

LABOR HISTORY  
OF  
OKLAHOMA



Oklahoma Farmers Union  
18 North Klein Street  
OKLAHOMA CITY, OKLA

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# LABOR HISTORY OF OKLAHOMA

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## INTRODUCTION

THIS BOOK is intended for general consumption, and, to that end, much material only interesting to minorities has been omitted. The date of organization (or disbandment) of certain locals, their present membership, the names of the officers—this information is of value chiefly to groups who already possess it and need no record of it here. The omission of matter, of course, does not always imply a lack of general interest. The space limitations for the volume were rigid, precluding the inclusion of many items that easily might have found a place in a longer work. Other items were left out because of their harmful or libelous nature. And, in a number of instances, pertinent data were not made available or could not be confirmed.

To emphasize an important, if obvious, fact, it should be mentioned that much of Oklahoma's labor history has been made during the life-span of the living; that there yet has not been time for the elimination of all but the fittest—most accurate—chroniclings. The task of compiling this history was complicated by an abundance, rather than a dearth, of source material. The occasional attempts at compromise, then, the middle-of-the-road treatment of several subjects and episodes, are essays after truth and not efforts to make it more palatable.

Generally, the events to be treated were determined by three factors: (1) their influence upon life within the State; (2) their typicality; (3) their entertainment value. These also determined the length of treatment. Here and there, of course, opinion probably has provided a fourth and variable factor; but not, it is believed, to the detriment of the book.

CLYDE HAMM, *Labor Editor*

JIM THOMPSON, *Director*



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THIS BOOK  
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## I. THE MINERS

UNTIL the opening of the coal mines at North McAlester, Indian Territory, in 1870, the Oklahoma area had no major industry and, hence, no labor movement. Thus, the miners — although there were small “strikes” in certain industries before their coming — may be considered the first group in what is now Oklahoma to organize and bargain collectively.

Coal mining developed rapidly with the construction of the M-K-T R. R. to McAlester in 1872, and by 1899 twenty-two mines were being operated in the Choctaw and Chickasaw Nations, where the richest veins were centered. Practically all these mines were owned by the railroad companies.

At first the Indian governments, reflecting the attitude of the fullblood citizens, showed little or no desire to see the mines opened, but their reluctance was overcome by the influence of the inter-married whites. Ownership of land was restricted to tribal members, but under the Choctaw law any citizen finding a mine was owner to a lease thereof subject to the right of the nation's royalty, and could work the mine exclusively for a mile in any direction from the point of discovery. These leases were made by the citizens, subject to the approval of the Choctaw National Agent. When the Attorney General handed down an opinion that no law existed authorizing such approval, a legal method of leasing was formulated. Under this system, the leases were made with two mining trustees, one representing the Choctaw and the other the Chickasaw Nation, acting under direction of the Secretary of the Interior of the United States.

Royalties paid the Indian governments by the mining com-



panies for the year 1888 exceeded \$100,000, and most of Indian Territory's coal bearing areas, about 12,000 square miles, were in some stage of development by 1900. In each instance of opening a new field railroads were directly responsible.

The great depression of 1873 brought unemployment and low wages to the coal fields in the eastern States. Consequently, when railroads offered jobless miners free transportation to Indian Territory, a migration of workers ensued. Most were immigrants of English, Scotch, Irish and Welsh nationality. But in the 1880's there was an influx of immigrants directly from southern and eastern Europe — Italians, Lithuanians, Slovaks, Poles, Magyars, and Russians. So rapidly did these European peoples pour into the Indian Territory that by 1890 foreign-born workers outnumbered natives two to one.

The fact that these foreign-born workers were not familiar with American organizations and standards of living was used to lower the general wage levels in Indian Territory. In some instances wages were forced down to \$30 a month. Nothing was paid for brushing or dead work, other than coal tonnage rates. Moreover, the mines were operated with a minimum of machinery and capital; the sole object often being to get the coal out as quickly and cheaply as possible.

This policy of quick profits, rather than one of developing the mines thoroughly for larger production at a later date, greatly augmented the naturally hazardous conditions. There was no law to safeguard the workers. Miners fired their own shots, and the shafts were rarely free from coal dust, damp gas, and powder smoke. The extremely dangerous explosive qualities of coal dust were only vaguely recognized at this time. "Windy" shots — that backfired and exploded the dry coal dust — were permitted to be fired at any time of the day or night and often resulted in death or serious

injury. In addition to working without safety devices, under the continuous threat of being killed by an explosion of gas or dust and falls of coal or rock, the miners often had to work standing in water and, where the vein of coal was thin, upon their knees. An early day miner described the mining conditions as follows:

Up until the year 1885 the miners fired their own shots, and it was a common occurrence for them to hold on to props and rails to keep from being blown away by windy shots at firing time; and it is here the term "windy" shot originated; least I never heard the term before 1884. Not knowing the dangers, we used to laugh when coal dust was blown into our eyes, ears, nose and mouth, but the laugh soon turned to horror, for on the second day of February, 1885, an explosion occurred in Mine No. 1, Savanna, in which one man lost his life and a number were severely injured. In the same year a windy shot burned a number of men in Mine No. 10, Krebs, and the following month in Mine No. 7, Krebs, when miners were firing their own shots, an explosion occurred which killed thirteen men. Windy shots were beginning to get serious.

On April 4, 1886, a mine explosion at Savanna killed six men working in the mine, and twelve others died of asphyxiation while attempting their rescue. Then on January 7, 1892, the most disastrous explosion in the history of Indian Territory and Oklahoma mining blasted through Mine No. 11, Krebs, owned by the Osage Coal and Mining Company. According to the *Kingfisher Free Press* of January 14, 1892:

At the time 350 men were in the shaft, most of whom were waiting for the cage to take them out, and



the foot of the shaft is one mass of dead bodies. Eighty-five came out by an old entry and forty-two were saved by the shaft, most of whom are more or less burned and bruised, and half will probably die. One man climbed out of the shaft 550 feet deep by working from bracket to bracket and was saved. The scene as reported by those who entered the shaft was horrible. Limbs, arms and headless bodies were stacked in a pile and only five out of twenty-four could be identified. Six small boys who attended the fans were mutilated so badly that their own parents could not recognize them and they will be buried side by side.

A windy shot had caused the explosion — an explosion that killed one hundred men and seriously injured more than two hundred. Largely as a result of the catastrophe, the Federal government appointed a United States Inspector of Mines to provide safer conditions for miners in the Territory.

The first union among the miners was a local assembly of the Knights of Labor, organized at Midway, in the Krebs field, August 6, 1882; the organizers were two miners, Dill Carrol and Frank Murphy, who had come into the Territory from Gillespie, Illinois. This local assembly was immediately granted a charter from the national union. It was known as a "mixed" assembly, although nearly all its members were coal miners. The Knights of Labor program was highly idealistic, and had as its chief aims the education of the members and cooperation with producers.

The mining communities, as a rule, sprang up a considerable distance from the developed centers of population. A typical community included rows of houses — generally two or three room shacks — built by the operators, and a community store at which the workers purchased their supplies. Rent was deducted from wages, and miners were held respon-

sible for the upkeep of their dwellings. Whenever a worker was ready to move from a company house, his wages were held back until the house was inspected and all damages that the owner might claim were satisfied. Many miners complained that this arrangement frequently resulted in the rankest sort of exploitation. Wages were paid in scrip, exchangeable only at the company store, and prices there as a rule were higher than at independent stores. Protests against these conditions were ineffective because of the isolation of the mining communities. Discontent grew and trade union sentiment spread among the miners, principally among Americans and immigrants from the British Isles.

By 1884 there were four local assemblies—two at Krebs, one at North McAlester, and one at Savanna — with a membership of about 1,500. Three of the locals were "mixed" assemblies, while the fourth was an exclusive organization of miners. The latter was located at Krebs and had a membership of 800; the "mixed" assembly at the same town had 350 members; and the locals at Savanna and North McAlester had about 150 members each.

Immediately testing its strength, the new union demanded — and received — a nine-and-a-half-hour day, uniform wages of \$2.50 a day — about 50c above the prevailing rate — and a signed agreement with the operators.\* After this victory union growth proceeded apace, though no paid organ-

*\* The "piece rate" wage system has been uniformly used in underground mine work; that is miners are paid a flat per tonnage rate for all coal mined. Daily wages are arrived at on the basis of the average worker's earnings for one day. A trade agreement specifying a certain daily wage does not mean that all miners will receive that amount; but only those that are classed as day miners.*



izers were sent into the Territory by the national body.

The real test of unionism came in 1894, when the first major strike was called against the coal operators. Early in March the mine owners, claiming they had lost some of their markets, announced a 25 per cent wage reduction, effective in April. They further insisted that if the proposed reduction of wages was accepted, they could recover their lost markets, and the miners would get more days' work.

Neither the claims of lost markets nor diminished production are substantiated by figures on total output and total income from coal for the years just prior to 1894. On the contrary there had occurred a substantial increase in both tonnage marketed and money received. For instance, in 1891, according to the Oklahoma Geological Survey the coal output reached 1,091,000 tons, worth \$1,897,037; in 1892, 1,192,721 tons, worth \$2,043,479; and in 1893, the year preceding the wage reduction, 1,252,110 tons were mined bringing an income of \$2,235,209.

The miners protested the reduction, and on March 21, 1894, a number of mine superintendents met with a committee of the miners' union (Knights of Labor), Lehigh, I. T. Meanwhile, the Choctaw Coal and Railway Company, attempted to operate their mines at Alderson and Hartshorne under the reduced wage scale.

The bargaining committee returned from Lehigh and advised the miners not to accept the cut. Mass meetings were held in all mining camps, and, when the mine superintendents remained adamant, nearly all the miners throughout the Territory struck.

A third and important group—the tribal government of the Choctaw Nation—soon entered the struggle. With the mines closed the nation was losing its royalties and its fees of a dollar a month, required of miners working in the Territory. Consequently, the tribal government sided with the

mining companies and brought pressure to bear upon the Commissioner of Indian Affairs to have the strikers evicted from the Territory. Legally, it was within its rights: all white men who lacked permits to remain in the Indian Nations could be expelled, removed to the "nearest adjacent State."

Dew M. Wisdom, Commissioner of Indian Affairs for the Territory, on May 11, 1894, requested of the Secretary of the Interior, Hoke Smith, that Federal troops be sent to eject the striking miners from the Choctaw Nation. He enclosed a letter from Wilson N. Jones, Principal Chief of the Choctaw Nation, in which Jones urged prompt removal of the strikers. Jones listed the names of many of the miners he said had quit work and were attempting to prevent the employment of others. To support his request Commissioner Wisdom reported:

There are 2,000 miners who have struck, and they are exceedingly boisterous and threatening. My police force, supported by a squad of marshals, is inadequate to meet the crisis. I regard the presence of the military as absolutely essential. Prompt action alone will prevent serious trouble.

The Secretary of the Interior on May 21 requested the War Department to dispatch troops to the Choctaw Nation to eject the strikers, and on May 31, three companies of Federal infantry from Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, arrived by special train at South McAlester. Companies G of the 12th Infantry regiment and H of the 13th were sent to Hartshorne, and A of the 19th to Alderson. The camps at Lehigh and Coalgate were guarded by the two companies of cavalry from Fort Reno.

Accompanied by Indian police to point out the "intruders"



—i. e., strikers whose permits to remain in the nation no longer were being paid by the coal companies — the soldiers went in parties, each under the command of a sergeant, to make arrests. The troops and deputy marshals acted with considerable force in carrying out the eviction order. Said the *Daily Oklahoman*, of June 21, under a Fort Smith dateline:

Details of the horrible state of affairs which exists in the mining region of the Indian Territory have been brought to this city by the evicted miners. The stories of oppression, hardship and cruelty to themselves, their wives and children by the deputy marshals and federal troops are similar to those which sometimes come from Siberia. Many of the men were thrown bodily from their homes, their wives and children beaten and bruised, and their furniture and household effects destroyed, after which they were loaded into box cars like cattle and shipped out of the Territory. The stories told of brutality by the men from the Hartshorne district are revolting to the extreme. August Smith, one of the Hartshorne miners, says troops came to his house and arrested him. They would not allow him to put on his shoes and coat, and refused to let the family eat breakfast. The soldiers threw out his furniture into a wagon and then asked Smith's wife if she wanted to go. "No," she said. "I have worked for this home and if I leave it you will have to shoot me." Smith said, "The house was built by me and belongs to me, though I have no legal title to it. The Commander ordered the privates to put my wife and five children out . . . four or five seized her and dragged her to the wagon and threw her headforemost into it. We were then carted to the station and put into a box-car with dozens of others." Most of the miners and

their families were thrown out in a driving rain and no time was given them to dress or eat breakfast. In one instance a family of four was evicted near Alderson. The wife of the miner was struck over the head with a Winchester and severely maltreated by the soldiers. The woman was enceinte at the time, and while being carted to the station gave premature birth to a dead child. She is in a critical condition and may die.

Alderson was designated the troops' headquarters, and all arrested persons were brought there, preparatory to deportation. An estimated 350 striking miners, and an undetermined number of women and children, were loaded into box cars and taken to the nearest State line, the point chosen being Jenson, Arkansas. Governor William Fishback, upon receiving the information of this action, protested strenuously against the dumping of "undesirable characters" in his State and let it be known that he would not tolerate the continuance of it. An international angle was introduced when the governments of Great Britain and Italy, of which many of the evicted miners were citizens, lodged protests with the Commissioner of Indian Affairs through the State Department. The miners, meanwhile, did not meekly submit to being ousted; many of them, especially those without families, caught the first freight trains west and returned to their homes.

A denial that the miners were deported because they were strikers was made later by Agent Wilson. He states: "The parties were removed because they were intruders, not because they were strikers." Despite this statement, the fact remains that Chief Jones of the Choctaw Nation, in his letter, listed only striking miners for deportation. And all deported miners were strikers, and members of the Knights of Labor.

In another report Wisdom declared:



The majority of the miners who had struck were foreigners, and they either did not understand or did not respect American law and American institutions, and preferred anarchy rather than a reign of law and order.

This report seems without sufficient foundation, viewing the fact that neither casualties nor any great loss of property, except for the household effects and property lost by the strikers, was reported. Demonstrations by miners, in the main, did not reach a point of actual violence. Typical of the demonstrations was one that took place at Lehigh and Coalgate May 9, as reported by the *Daily Oklahoman*:

Large bodies of men went into the pit (of the Williamson Brothers Company) yesterday and tried to induce the men to quit work, by moral persuasion, but all the argument they could produce resulted to no purpose. The miners then announced there would be another meeting of Lehigh and Coalgate at No. 6 bridge at 6 o'clock the next morning. . . . At 7 o'clock a reporter visited No. 6 bridge and found 1,000 men and women forming a line. The procession was headed by two flag bearers, next came fifty women, followed by one hundred and twenty-five men armed with Winchester and shotguns, then came the Coalgate brass band, heading the balance of the procession who were all armed with clubs. The line was four deep and almost a mile in length and they moved down toward the strip pit to the time of a live, quick step. When they came in view of the marshals and company officials clustered together on a high bank, work was immediately suspended. The miners marched by without any demonstration other than those made by some of

the women, who hurled coal at some of the workmen. The committee dropped out of line and interviewed Mr. Williamson, who stated that work would be abandoned, but would not guarantee for how long. The miners then marched on into Lehigh.

Many of the deported miners came back to the Choctaw Nation immediately, others had to negotiate for a return. But eventually Agent Wisdom reported to Washington: "It should be stated that all the miners who have been evicted have returned and propose to remain here permanently."

Immediately upon the calling of the strike the mine operators dispatched scouts to Alabama, Arkansas, and Louisiana, to secure low-paid Negro and white workers. Free transportation was provided, but the scouts failed to bring in as many low-wage workers as the operators had hoped, and many of those brought in were induced to join the union. Another aid to the strikers was the diversion into a war chest of a fund originally appropriated to finance the construction of a meeting hall at Krebs (each local Assembly of the Knights of Labor had contributed \$500 to build the hall). This money was used to provide for the striking miners and their families.

After the abortive attempt to expel them from the Territory, the miners succeeded in tying up operations to the extent that the owners were compelled to come to terms. A settlement was reached July 31, 1894; it provided for a 20 per cent reduction in the scale, or only 5 per cent less than the proposed reduction which had led to the strike, but the operators made valuable concessions. For instance, there was a 10 per cent reduction in house rent, a reduction of 25 cents a keg on powder, and a cut in prices charged the miners for the coal they used.

The Knights of Labor reached the peak of their power soon after the strike of 1894 but suffered a rapid decline



shortly afterward as the order deteriorated nationally. Several causes contributed to the downfall of the K. of L., chief of which was the very nature of the organization. The structure of the Order was highly centralized; the national assembly with its permanent officers exercised an absolute authority over local units. Frequently, national and district assemblies were out of touch with the peculiar problems and needs of local units. The heterogeneity of the membership was another strong factor in the disintegration of the Knights. Still another was the extraordinarily high assessment per member.

Coexistent with and perhaps also a contributory cause to the rapid fall of the organization was the rise of the United Mine Workers of America. In the incipient stages of the UMWA, numerous members of the K. of L. joined it, thereby holding membership in both organizations. Most of them later dropped their membership in the Noble Order and gave their full attention to the new union when the national board of the K. of L. voiced strenuous objections to the dual membership. This but hastened the disintegration of the old union and the rise of the new one.

The United Mine Workers of America made its first appearance in what is now Oklahoma in 1898 when a national organizer, James Burton, was sent into Arkansas and Indian Territory. Founded in Ohio in 1890 and chartered by the American Federation of Labor, the UMWA was organized along industrial lines — one big union in a single industry — as opposed to the usual craft system of the A. F. of L. It tended to correct the weakness that had caused the decline of the Knights of Labor since, although not a craft union, only the employees of a single industry were included. In fact, the founding of the UMWA marked the beginning of the growth of industrial unionism in America.

The UMWA had come upon the scene at a propitious time; the workers' cost of living had taken an abrupt turn upward

while wages remained stationary. Hours of work were long; working conditions were little better than they had been at the time of the 1894 strike. Nor had there been any alleviation of the harshness of the company-town system; on the contrary, employers had learned to use this advantage against the miners to vitiate their bargaining power. A worker could be evicted from a company house, his supplies cut off, and he and his family subjected to inconvenience, and suffering.

Concessions in the way of safety promotion devices and regulations had been secured, but working conditions still remained exceedingly hazardous. In the United States, as a whole, an average of 2.6 persons engaged in the coal mining industry lost their lives each day and as many more were grievously maimed. And of all the fields in the Nation those in Indian Territory were the most dangerous. Forced to work in powder smoke, in foul air, and in water, those miners who escaped death or injury by rock or coal falls or explosion often succumbed to miners' asthma.

Thus, as the United Mine Workers of America moved in, they found the miners in a mood to rebel against their precarious condition. The first local was formed at Krebs in 1898, and the union rapidly spread to most mining camps in the Indian Nations and western Arkansas. There soon were enough locals to form a district, and on October 7, 1898, District 21, United Mine Workers of America, was organized at a convention at Fort Smith, Arkansas. Albert Struble of Jenny Lind, Arkansas, was elected president of the new district. The convention passed a resolution urging Congress to abolish the system of scrip and company stores and its consequent evils.

A greater demand for coal had brought higher prices and the opening of many new mines in the Territory. But there were no higher wages with which to meet increased living costs. The first demands of District 21 were for higher wages



and union recognition. These the operators refused to grant.

Later in the winter of 1898, the UMWA began calling strikes in various mining localities. Workers were called out of the organized mines and others followed as soon as they could be organized. Financial assistance from the United Mine Workers of Illinois, and the participation of many non-union men in the walkout saved the strike from early collapse. All told, 2,000 miners walked out at the beginning of the strike, and ultimately, most of the coal miners of Indian Territory, Kansas, Arkansas, and Texas — 50,000 men or approximately one-third of all the workers engaged in coal mining.

Employers resisted the strike determinedly. Within a year after its organization, District 21 seemed on the verge of falling apart. But the union held together despite the ebb and flow of its fortunes. Not until its closing months was the strike definitely established throughout the mining area. Mine superintendents harried the strikers with injunctions, or continued operations with imported strike breakers.

In the late spring of 1899, Judge A. H. Skidmore granted an injunction against the Kansas and Texas Coal Company, enjoining it from bringing in, for the operation of its struck mines, any convict laborers, undesirable citizens, or people with malignant or contagious diseases. This injunction reflected a sharp departure from the attitude of most jurists of the time. One judge, in passing sentence on ten miners convicted of violating a restraining injunction, characterized their attempts to say who should be employed, and other rights which the union undertook to exercise, as anarchy that, if not attended to, would wipe out the most cherished principles of both State and Federal constitutions — the rights of life, liberty and the enjoyment of peaceful pursuits.

However, Judge Skidmore's action, and others similar, did not prevent the importation of great numbers of Negro

workers, notably from Alabama, Tennessee, and West Virginia. Said the South McAlester *Capital* of July 6, 1899:

At four o'clock this afternoon a train of four coaches loaded with Negro miners from West Virginia went down on the M-K-T; their destination being Coalgate, where they will be put to work immediately in the mines. . . . While there is no apprehension of trouble it has been decided expedient and wise to take precautionary measures, and sixteen deputy marshals will be left at Coalgate a few days until matters begin to run smoothly. The importation was a genuine surprise to the miners and the people of Coalgate.

The Atoka Coal and Mining Company, Lehigh, built about 50 four- and five-room dwellings and a large boarding house to accommodate its imported Negroes. Upon arrival they were placed in a large "bull-pen," constructed for the purpose, where they were given the protection of armed guards deputized as United States marshals until it was considered safe for them to move into the houses and go to work.

As strikebreakers moved in, striking miners were given notice to vacate company houses. Tents were pitched by the union to house these evicted miners and their families, and depots at Wilburton and other points were established to distribute food. Funds were so scarce that often as little as \$1.00 a week for each family was available for relief. Evicted from their homes, their personal effects sold for debt, their gardens destroyed, hundreds of men, women and children lived for weeks on little more than turnips. "I shall make a dollar look as big as a wagon wheel," said Superintendent Edwin Ludlow, of the Atoka Coal and Mining Company, according to the South McAlester *Capital*.

In the end, however, the operators signed an agreement



that constituted an important victory for the miners. It was signed at Pittsburg, Kansas, on August 1, 1903, between practically all the operators of Kansas, Indian Territory, Arkansas and Texas, united in the Southwestern Interstate Coal Operators Association, and Districts 21, 25 and 14 of the United Mine Workers of America, including most of the coal miners in these States.

The provisions of the agreement were:

1. Recognition of the union.
2. The eight-hour day.
3. A pit committee in each mine to settle disputes with representatives of the employer.
4. Payment of wages twice a month.
5. The check-off (dues, assessments, fines and initiation fees of members were to be subtracted from wages by the employers and paid to the representatives of the UMWA).
6. Payment for all "dead work"—measurement of entries, brushing, room-turning.
7. Equal opportunities to work for all miners.
8. No deductions from wages to pay the salary of a company physician without the miners' consent.
9. Payment of wages on the following basis:

Seventy-two cents per ton or about \$2.56 per day.

Along with all other districts of the UMWA, District 21 accepted a 5 per cent wage reduction in 1904; this was gained back in 1906. In the 1906 agreement, the operators won an important concession in acquiring the right to fine miners fifty cents for each day's stoppage of work wherever "wildcat" or little local strikes were called. A permanent board of arbitration was established, and it was agreed that there would be no tie-up of the mines for two years.

The settlement of this difference was followed by a period of prosperity for both workers and owners. According to the Krebs *Banner* of July 13, 1906:

The demand for coal is growing every day. The mines are running with forces almost up to the old standard, yet they are all behind with orders. Bumper crops in Oklahoma and Texas have stimulated the market. At the close of the strike there was no storage coal in the entire southwestern country. The retail trade, manufacturers and railroads were in need. Before this demand was noticeably relieved, the threshing season came on and orders commenced to flow again. It is thought, by some of the operators, that many foreigners who left the fields at the outbreak of the strike will return from alien shores by August. With them will come others. It is estimated that every miner who returned to the old country will come back accompanied by at least three others of his nationality. This will assist materially in meeting the demand for fuel, but even then there will be room for hundreds of coal diggers. . . . The McAlester *Capital* says that 1,000 miners can find employment in Indian Territory immediately and in thirty days there will be room for five hundred more. . . .

And on July 13, the *Banner* declared:

Prosperity has returned to the McAlester coal belt to stay — a fact which is proved by the disbursement of the banks to the miners on the weekly payroll, within the current month. The banks have paid to the miners \$75,757. With the increase in the mining force the payroll will probably go to nearly \$100,000.00,



which means that over a million dollars will be paid in wages within the current year.

The prosperous years were to run, with minor fluctuations, for another decade and a half. Agreements between the union and the organized operators served to reduce somewhat the powers formerly exercised by the individual employer. As workers became prosperous they built their own homes, and the old mining camp with its company houses and company store began, at least partially, to disappear.

## II. MASS ORGANIZATION

### THE CRAFTS

WHILE the miners were well to the fore in the labor movement, other crafts were quick to organize in the larger communities of Indian Territory — Bartlesville, McAlester, Muskogee, Tulsa, and Shawnee. In Oklahoma Territory the first attempt at craft organization seems to have been made in 1893 by the bricklayers at Oklahoma City. This local became inactive soon after its inception, but the craft again led the organized labor movement when, in 1900, it organized Local No. 1 at Oklahoma City and conducted such a consistent drive that by the time of statehood (1907), it was one of the strongest craft unions in the State.

Carpenters, painters, plasterers, and hod carriers began active organization during the later 1890's, as did typographical workers, cigar makers, building engineers, and others. In 1903 *The Labor Signal* announced that "... organized labor has doubled its membership in Oklahoma Territory since 1902!"

Throughout the year 1903, labor continued its organizational policy. Flashes from *The Labor Signal* reveal the rapidity of organization:

January 16 — Garment Workers' Local No. 222 of Shawnee receives charter from the National Garment Workers.

January 23 — Journeymen Horseshoers organize at Oklahoma City and apply for charter to the International Union of Journeymen Horseshoers of the United States and Canada . . . Thirty-five labor organizations in Oklahoma City are invited to attend the Labor Temple meet-



ing.

January 30 — Oklahoma City Pressmen organize.

February 6 — W. P. Hawkins organizes a Clerks' Union in South McAlester.

February 7 — Journeymen Bakers' and Confectioners' Local No. 217 organizes at Oklahoma City.

March 6 — Guthrie Typographical Union No. 587 organizes.

April 24 — Teamsters organize; and reports indicate women are forming a big auxiliary union.

July 17 — Oklahoma City laundry workers organize.

August 14 — New unions since the January directory: Tinners', Painters', College of American Carpentry, Paperhangers', Broommakers', and Decorators'.

#### THE RAILROAD BROTHERHOODS

Among the first craft unions to organize successfully were the railroad brotherhoods: the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers, the Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen and Enginemen, the Order of Railway Conductors, and the Brotherhood of Railroad Trainmen.

The railway labor movement may be said to have started with the entry of the first railroad into what is now Oklahoma, on June 6, 1870. But it was several years after the M-K-T finished construction of its line through the Indian Territory that the first brotherhood lodge was established. Before that time members simply retained membership in lodges in the neighboring States of Kansas, Missouri and Texas.

The first territorial lodge established by any of the brotherhoods was founded by the Brotherhood of Railroad Trainmen, under the direction of T. B. Dodge. This first chapter of twenty members was organized as Indianola Lodge No.

473 at South McAlester on January 16, 1898; in 1902 it was moved to Haileyville and one year later to Shawnee, where it continues to function.

The railroad unions were first conceived as fraternal orders for mutual insurance protection. Collective bargaining had no part in their initial program and there was no immediate demand for better working conditions. But conditions that followed the economic depression of 1883 caused much concern among railroad employees. Common railway labor received an average daily wage of 90c; firemen, \$1.35 per day; and four days comprised an average week's work. Workers were subject to day and night calls, fifteen to eighteen hours constituted a regular workday, and wages were in arrears on many lines throughout the country. Union members found their names on company blacklists and railway officials refused to confer with employee committees. Through a succession of wage reductions many workers actually were destitute, even though on regular runs.

The four transportation brotherhoods were destined to play an important part in the trade union movement in Oklahoma, especially from 1906 on. In that year they joined forces with the Farmers' Union and the Twin-Territorial Federation of Labor to adopt a program to present to the Constitutional Convention.

#### TWIN-TERRITORIAL FEDERATION OF LABOR

The craft union, in contrast to the industrial union where all workers of a single industry are combined in one organization, restricts its membership to a particular craft practiced within an industry. Thus, while both carpenters and plasterers are engaged in a single industry — the building trade — they are organized into separate unions. As early as 1886, with the formation of the American Federation of



Labor, craft unions had federated nationally. But the first successful attempt in Oklahoma to unite all labor unions into a coordinated working body came in 1903 with the formation of the Twin-Territorial Federation of Labor. Known as the Oklahoma State Federation of Labor since 1906, it was organized at Lawton on December 28, 1903, and received a charter from the American Federation of Labor on February 15, 1904.

The convention was conceived by J. Harvey Lynch of the Plasterers' Union at Lawton, who became the first secretary-treasurer of the Federation. His call for a labor meeting was answered by nearly all the various craft unions active at the time.

The success of the convention must be accredited to the coal miners of the Indian Territory who furnished delegates from fifteen locals and paid approximately 90 per cent of Federation expenses during its early years. However, the craft unions were well represented. The carpenters led with delegates from twelve locals; there were nine federal union delegates; four teamsters'; two barbers'; two printers'; one plasterer; and two delegates from independent organizations.

"At all points in the meeting," said the *Oklahoma City Journal* of January 1, 1904, "the best of harmony prevailed (and) a very strong organization was perfected which will hold meetings annually." General offices were established in Lawton. The first officials were Peter Hanraty, president; J. Harvey Lynch, secretary-treasurer; Frank Knight, 1st vice-president; W. H. Dickerson, 2nd vice-president; A. J. Wattmeyer, 3rd vice-president; Allen Fields, 4th vice-president, and R. R. Browning, 5th vice-president.

At the time of its formation the Twin-Territorial Federation of Labor claimed to represent approximately 12,000 organized workers — all within the two Territories. And by the end of 1907, according to the State Department of Labor,

there were 303 labor organizations with a combined membership of 21,280 within the State, although some of these, like the railroad brotherhoods, were not affiliated with the Federation.

#### THE 1906 SHAWNEE CONVENTION

In 1906, with statehood imminent, there was need of concerted action by labor, and a convention of the Twin-Territorial Federation opened at Shawnee on August 20th. At the same time the Federation was in session, the State Farmers' Union and the Four Railroad Brotherhoods were holding their conventions in the city. The Federation meeting was opened by President Hanraty, who discussed the labor measures that should be incorporated in the Constitution of the new State and emphasized his belief in permanent cooperation by the labor organizations then in session. President S. O. Daws of the Farmers' Union spoke after Mr. Hanraty; he made similar proposals and suggested a plan of mutual cooperation between the farmers and organized labor.

As a result of this discussion, representatives from each convention were selected to form a joint board of ten members: three from the Federation of Labor; three from the Farmers Union; and one from each of the four brotherhoods. Peter Hanraty, J. Harvey Lynch, and John L. Britton represented the Federation; the Farmers' Union selected J. A. West, R. E. Duff, and J. R. Gotcher; and the brotherhoods designated W. T. Field, O. C. Strode, G. E. Waring, and D. A. Crafton. Meeting at Shawnee on September 10, 1906, this board prepared labor's program for submission to the Constitutional Convention. It included a comprehensive list of twenty-four labor measures which were placed before every candidate delegate to the convention. So vigorously did labor carry the fight that seventy-five per cent of the elected delegates approved all the labor measures, while



an additional fifteen per cent approved a portion of the program.

The twenty-four demands were:

1. The initiative and referendum, with the right of recall as adopted and applied in the State of Oregon.
2. A blanket primary for the nomination of every officer in the State of Oklahoma on the plurality vote by the Australian system.
3. The power of civil authorities shall never be usurped by the military authorities.
4. The State may engage in any industry.
5. That the common law relieving the employer from liability to employees injured through carelessness of a fellow servant be abrogated and suitable laws passed by the first legislature protecting employees under such conditions.
6. The right to recover damages for injury or death shall never be abrogated and the amount recoverable shall never be subject to any statutory limitation.
7. Not more than eight hours shall constitute a day's work in all underground mines and on all work carried on by the State, county, or municipality, and the legislature shall pass suitable laws to provide for the health and safety of employees in factories, mills, smelters, mines, and on railroads.
8. That there shall be three commissioners elected by the people to regulate and maintain rates for the railroads, insurance, telegraph, express companies, telephone and pipelines, and all other corporations.
9. Compulsory education and free books printed by the State.
10. There shall be established and maintained the office of chief mine inspector, who shall be selected by the people.

11. Sanitary inspection of shops and homes.
12. A commissioner of labor and commerce to be selected by the people.
13. A commissioner of agriculture.
14. A liberal exemption and homestead law.
15. The Constitutional Convention shall define who shall constitute the returning (election) board until otherwise provided by law.
16. A corporation tax committee of three, elected by the people, who shall have full power to inspect all accounts, vouchers and books at any time, and put the true valuation on all stocks, bonds, property, receipts and other money values, so that all corporations shall be assessed by the duly elected assessors.

(These sixteen measures were known as legislative demands, while the eight following were classed as prohibitive demands:)

1. The employment of children under sixteen years in mines, mills, or factories.
2. The contracting of convict labor.
3. The labor of convicts outside of prison walls, except on public roads, under the direct control of the State.
4. The political and commercial control of employees.
5. The railroads from owning coal lands or leasing any kind of mines, directly or indirectly.
6. Any corporation from transacting business in the State without first securing a charter under State laws.
7. All gambling in farm products.
8. The legislature shall not have the power to grant irrevocable franchises.

Although Hanraty was vice-president of the Convention and most of the delegates had approved the program, it did



not pass in its entirety. Many of the demands, especially those not directly affecting labor, such as the initiative and referendum and blanket primary, were written into the Constitution with little or no difficulty. But other measures more pertinent to labor, were either partially evaded or so ambiguously drawn as to lose their original intent. It should be mentioned, however, that a number of the twenty-four points, which were amended or failed of approval, were no longer important after the passage of the Workmen's Compensation Law in 1915.

The Convention made provisions for a commissioner of labor, to be elected by the people for a term of four years, who was to control the Department of Labor, wherein should be established a Board of Arbitration and Conciliation. The elective office of Chief Mine Inspector also was created.

The Constitution, as finally adopted, was ratified by popular vote on September 17, 1907; the two Territories united to become a new State on November 16, and Oklahoma's first legislature convened at Guthrie on December 2.

#### THE FIRST STATE LEGISLATURE

During the Convention of the Oklahoma State Federation of Labor at Oklahoma City in 1907, J. Luther Langston succeeded J. Harvey Lynch as Secretary-Treasurer of the Convention; "Little Pete" Hanraty, John L. Britton, and G. Edward Warren were designated as a committee to lobby for labor legislation. Working with very limited funds, the committee strove earnestly for the passage of those measures which had failed of adoption in the Constitution and for the enactment of other laws favorable to labor.

Although G. Edward Warren records that, "several members of the legislature seem to have lost the interest they once manifested in the cause of labor," it is quite likely that

the legislators, in many instances, saw no need for the laws which the unionists urged. This was brought out during the debate upon the Factory Inspectors' Bill, when a legislator declared he "... had never heard of any factories in Oklahoma." At that time (1907) the *Oklahoma Almanac* disclosed that within the State \$20,000,000 had been invested in factories and shops, with an annual production valued at \$30,000,000, and that there were more than 8,000 industrial workers.

Despite the inimical attitude of certain lawmakers, or their lack of information, the first legislature enacted a greater part of the labor program during its six-month session. The more important points won included: acts providing for mining districts and district inspectors; creation of the State mining board; the State board of Arbitration and Conciliation; office of factory inspector; prohibiting the employment of children under sixteen years of age; the eight-hour day on State, county, and municipality work; compulsory school attendance; factory and boiler inspection; prohibiting importation of strikebreakers into the State by use of false statements as to employment conditions, and requiring employers to state in advertisements whether strikes are in progress; prohibiting the black-listing of employees; service letters to discharged employees, the latter act being of primary interest to railroad workers; and the creation of the Department of Charities and Corrections. The first appropriation for this department was not made until May 8, 1908.

In addition to these acts, and by far the most important of any of them, the so-called Labor's Bill of Rights was passed. It provided that:

No agreement, combination, or contract by or between two or more persons to do or procure to be done, or not to do or procure not to be done, any act in



contemplation or furtherance of any trade dispute between employers and employees, shall be deemed criminal, nor shall those engaged therein be indictable or otherwise punishable for the crime of conspiracy, if such act committed by one person would not be punishable as a crime, nor shall such agreement, combination or contract be considered as in restraint of trade or commerce, nor shall any restraining order or injunction be issued with relation thereto.

Labor was little affected, either favorably or adversely, in the sessions of the Second and Third Legislatures. But with the coming of the Fourth . . .

The eight-hour day bill for women in industry — amended to nine hours in certain specified industries — was killed by Governor Lee Cruce with a pocket veto. A similar fate was met by the "full crew" bill, sponsored by the railroad brotherhoods, which provided that on railway lines more than fifty miles long or with freight trains of more than twenty-five cars, the crew should be composed of an engineer, fireman, conductor, and three brakemen. Cruce vetoed this bill with the comment that railroad managers "... are better qualified to determine the manner in which they operate their trains than are the legislature, the laboring people, or the Governor," according to the *Oklahoma Labor Unit* of June 28, 1913.

During the session the house passed a bill providing for semi-monthly payments of wages in all industries within the State. The senate substituted a bill which applied only to employees of railroads, street car companies, and other transportation and transmission companies. The senate bill was passed without a dissenting vote and Governor Cruce, while the measure did not have his approval, allowed it to become a law without his signature.

Although the Federation's Committee lost ground as far

as its own bills were concerned, it was successful in fighting the legislation of the employer groups. Its efforts undoubtedly prevented the passage of such acts as the Industrial Court Bill, the Conspiracy Bill, the Anti-Picketing Bill, and a proposal to lengthen the working day on public works.

The attitude of Governor Cruce incurred for him the lasting enmity of organized labor. The Legislative Committee of the State Federation of Labor reported to its officials that, "The governor has, by his numerous acts . . . shown his hostility to the laborers of Oklahoma." It was resolved by union labor that every legitimate effort within its power be used to retire Governor Cruce from any further political preferment.

#### POST-STATEHOOD CONDITIONS

In Oklahoma, as in other states, the depression of 1907 resulted in wage reductions, and attempted reductions, and, inevitably, in labor disputes. Twenty-three strikes and lock-outs were reported within the State, with a loss in wages of approximately \$265,000 to the 2,403 workers involved. The strikers included those of coal miners at Lehigh and Lutie, commercial telegraphers at Oklahoma City and various other points, railway carmen at Chickasha and Shawnee, bricklayers at El Reno, and plumbers at both Chickasha and Oklahoma City.

The spread of unionization seems not to have been seriously hindered by these disputes. In 1908 craft unions reported the following percentages of organization: printers', 99 per cent, with average work days per year of 295; carpenters', 81.6 per cent, with average work days per year of 233.6; painters' and paperhangers', 86 per cent, with average work days per year of 241.7, and the bricklayers', 98 per cent, with employment during 7.1 months of the year. From 1907 to 1911, inclusive, the number of unions in the State increased



from 303 to 415, with a total membership of 25,000, or a gain of 3,720 over the 1907 figure.

The glass workers' strike at Tulsa, late in February 1911, was of particular interest because of its outcome. The question involved certain rules relative to the employment of apprentices and when the State Department of Labor was called in, the plants were operating with strikebreakers. Relations between management and employees were so strained that settlement could not be effected. Open shop conditions prevailed until October of the same year, when the strikebreakers themselves walked out, many of them affiliating with the Glass Workers' International Union.

On April 8, 1911, the union carmen of the M-K-T R. R. requested a conference with road officials. The request was ignored, in the face of constant agitation by the union, until August 7, when company officials declared that it would be "legally impossible" to enter into a full-system agreement. Investigation by union leaders disclosed no basis for this decision and a new request was made for a conference. At the same time a strike vote was taken, and on September 18 the union delivered an ultimatum to A. A. Allen, president and general manager of the M-K-T, giving the company until 3:30 p. m., September 22, to set a date for a conference. Company officials refused to consider a joint conference with the entire committee and so, on September 23, the unionists struck. After five weeks, with the railroad still refusing to recognize the union as a unit, the workers returned to their jobs.

In 1907, Bartlesville smelter workers had accepted an average wage reduction of fifteen cents a day with the understanding that the cut would be restored as soon as business conditions improved. After four years, during which the reduced scale remained in effect, the condenser cleaners at Plant No. 1 demanded an increase of thirty cents a day. The

company countered with an offer of twenty cents.

Those employed in other plants and operations, although drawing a \$2.00 wage, supported the demands of the condenser cleaners. There was no union organization among any of the workers, but they moved as a body. On April 13, 1911, within twelve hours after negotiations had failed, the entire forces of the three smelters — 1,500 men — walked out.

Representatives of the State Department of Labor met with a committee of nine workers (three from each plant) who had been given full power to effect an agreement. The department arranged for a joint conference with company officials but it was immediately apparent that a new working agreement could not be made.

The strike continued for another three or four days without any alarming disturbance. Then, officials of the smelter companies arrived from New York City and within two days the differences were adjusted and the plants reopened. Settlement was made upon the basis of a restoration of the general wage scale prior to the reduction of 1907.

The walkout of street railway workers in Oklahoma City on March 5, 1911, was the beginning of one of the major strikes of post-statehood Oklahoma. The employees of the Metropolitan Railway Company, among the lowest paid of any common carrier in the United States, had been trying to improve their conditions for months. But attempts to organize were met with discharge, and demands for better wages were summarily refused.

On Sunday morning, March 5, 1911, 189 motormen and conductors struck. The company tried to operate the cars with imported strikebreakers, but soon desisted. Sheriff Jack Spain, who had been elected by union labor, patrolled the town with several hundred deputies. But public sentiment was preponderantly on the side of the strikers, and thousands of people gathered below the balcony of the Huckins Hotel to



listen to laborite speakers.

During the following week the company again tried to operate, and many fights and riots broke out. On Thursday, a conference between strikers and company officials was held at the mayor's office, and a contract was signed by both parties before witnesses. The company agreed to recognize the union, not to discriminate against union men, to reinstate discharged employees upon application, and to recognize seniority rights. At four o'clock that day, street car service was restored in Oklahoma City. Fire whistles blew and extra papers appeared on the streets announcing settlement of the strike.

The "settlement," however, proved illusory. After three union-operated cars left the terminal, strikebreakers were pressed into service. Angered crowds assembled at the station. As each car arrived the operator was asked to produce his union card. So many crews arrived made up of strikebreakers that the crowds became difficult to handle and service was again discontinued. After a conference with railway officials, Governor Lee Cruce called out the militia. But so much pressure from strikers and sympathizers was brought to bear on him that he rescinded the order.

At this time, L. E. Patterson, president of the Patterson Street Railway which operated in Capitol Hill, was seeking a franchise in the city proper. To create good will he agreed to recognize the union. During the summer of 1911 he received the desired franchise, but instead of extending his lines he sold them to his competitor.

The strike dragged along all year with no recognition of the union nor wage increase, until it played out entirely. More than twenty years later, with the coming of President Franklin D. Roosevelt's regime, a street railway union was again organized. It is, now, with the possible exception of the oil workers or the taxi drivers, the strongest local in the city.

### III. AGRARIAN MOVEMENTS

**I**N 1910, 54.8 per cent of the farms in Oklahoma were tenant-operated and there were 104,000 tenant farmers and sharecroppers. While it is possible that shiftlessness partly accounted for this high rate of tenancy, other factors figured much more prominently.

Contrary to popular belief, the State was not settled by a series of free land openings. The land comprising the five Indian Nations, for instance, or roughly the eastern half of Oklahoma, was never opened to settlement by lotteries or runs. Except in the case of inter-married citizens or freedmen, any non-Indian who farmed there—prior to the division of the land by the Dawes Committee—was of necessity a tenant. When the division was completed in 1904, large areas of the Territory became available for sale. But tenancy continued to spread. The land all too frequently fell into the hands of speculators who could afford to accept a very nominal rate of interest on their investment while waiting for mineral development. Naturally, since their chief interest was not farming, they were little inclined to make improvements, to encourage soil conservation, or to take any interest in the land except to see that it was planted to some staple and fool-proof crop, usually cotton.

In the western half of Oklahoma, where there were free land openings, tenancy became rooted more slowly, but none the less surely. Few of the farmers were able to finance themselves for any great period of time. The loss of a crop, a protracted illness, a fire—any of these or a hundred other things might suffice to change a farmer from owner to tenant. The constant necessity to make the land earn quickly resulted



in wasteful agricultural practices. The farmer sold a little of his soil with each crop he produced. In time, even while practicing the most stringent economy, his debts far outweighed the value of his land and there was nothing for him to do but to become a tenant.

Politically, the majority of the settlers always had leaned, in varying degrees, upon their inheritance of western "radicalism"; and they did not meekly accept the precarious economic conditions reflected in the spread of tenancy. Almost as soon as there was a non-Indian farm population of any considerable size, an agrarian movement came into being.

#### THE FARMERS' ALLIANCE

In the decade following the Civil War, farmers had united nationally behind the Greenback Party, the Union Labor Party and the Agricultural Wheel, with programs stressing political action. In 1875, however, in Lampassas County, Texas, the Farmers' Alliance, basically a mutual marketing association, was organized.

While the formation of the alliance resulted from local needs, the organization soon spread into other States, and in 1885 locals were established in Indian Territory. Its strength was concentrated in the Cherokee Nation, and since the original program was of no great value to territorial residents, the members here drew up a separate list of objectives. These were: sale of all lands west of longitude 96 and belonging to the Cherokee Nation, at the rate of \$3.00 an acre; the survey of Indian Territory into sections, thereby providing public roads and enabling citizens better to locate their farms and to build permanent improvements and homes; a direct tax on property and income; Federal legislation to establish uniform freight service and rates; and provision by law of a

means of settling Indian land disputes in the United States Supreme Court.

The Indians asked that the demands be translated into Cherokee in order that all tribal members could discuss them. This was undoubtedly the first of the few incidents of Indian participation in an agrarian movement.

The major goal of the organization was the establishment of cooperatives, but the few that were formed went bankrupt from extending easy credit to members and from their low margin of profit. Unless the alliance is to be given credit for the inauguration of the Dawes Committee, it must be considered chiefly important for its educational campaigns and its support of the Populist Party. Partly due to this support, the Populists were able to elect a powerful minority bloc to the First Territorial Legislature, and by trading with the Democrats and Republicans, in the squabble over the location of the State Capitol, succeeded in electing two party members, George W. Gardenhire and A. N. Daniels, as president of the upper house and speaker of the house of representatives, respectively.

In 1896 with the fusion of the Populists and the Democrats, the Populists and the Farmers' Alliance lost their influence in Oklahoma. During their ascendancy, however, they had done much to strengthen the background of "radicalism" in Oklahoma politics; and the alliance had provided many thousands of organization-minded farmers for the agrarian movements that were to follow.

#### THE FARMERS' UNION

In September 1902, the first local of the Farmers' Union was formed in Raines County, Texas, by Newt Gresham, a former Farmers' Alliance member and organizer. The union made its first appearance in Oklahoma in 1903, and in Sep-



tember 1904, a convention was held at Durant, where the territorial delegates succeeded in winning the right to establish a territorial union.

After a campaign, aimed at the trusts, the corporations, and landlords, which lasted for two years, locals were formed throughout the Choctaw and Chickasaw Nations and Comanche County. In the latter alone, the union had a membership of more than 6,000. Profiting by the mistakes of the Farmers' Alliance, the union established highly successful cooperatives — cotton gins, warehouses, grain elevators and retail merchandise stores — giving their members a distinct advantage in selling and processing their produce and in purchasing their needs. The union also placed into operation a mutual insurance plan under which the farmers could insure in a body. This, today, is one of the outstanding features of the organization. A joint convention of locals in Oklahoma and Indian Territory was held at Shawnee in March 1905, and the two branches were merged into the Farmers' Educational and Cooperative Union of Indiahoma, with an estimated membership of 50,000 divided equally between the two territories. The delegates voted unanimously to cooperate with organized labor — a policy that has been pursued to the present.

The rapidly increasing strength of the organization made it an object of attack in many quarters. As part of its cooperative activities it had engaged in shipping coal to members at an appreciable saving, and, in the autumn of 1905, a purchasing organization was established to acquire coal direct from the producers. The latter accepted a number of large orders, but shipments from the mines were constantly delayed. After repeated protests in which S. O. Daws, president of the union, charged that the coal and lumber companies were conspiring to break the cooperatives, legal aid was employed and two private investigators hired to investigate

the alleged conspiracy. The findings were to be presented to President Theodore Roosevelt, to Congress, and to the Federal Trade Commission. Early in March, however, a representative of the Rock Island Railroad, one of the chief offenders according to the union's charges, met with President Daws and declared that his company was ready to haul the long-delayed shipments. Soon, the other railroads gave similar insurances.

In February 1906, the *Indiahoma Union Signal*, official organ of the Farmers' Union, was moved to Shawnee. When application was made to re-enter the paper as second-class matter it was denied by an Assistant Postmaster General on the grounds that the paper was advertising matter and could only be carried at the first-class rate. The union protested vigorously, declaring that the paper was a legitimate newspaper with paid circulation, and as such entitled to second-class registration. Protests were sent to the Postmaster General, to Congress and to the President; at the same time a call was issued to the members for pennies to provide mailing fees while the fight was in progress. The response was tremendous; thousands of pennies, nickels, and dimes rolled into union headquarters.

Union leaders declared the adverse ruling to be an infringement of the freedom of the press: "While we are denied the right today, under the same ruling, any other publisher may be denied the right tomorrow!" Bird McGuire, territorial delegate, fought for the union cause in Congress and in July the paper was re-admitted as second-class mail.

In 1905 the Farmers' Union inaugurated what was probably the first crop-curtailment program in the Nation. In order to obtain higher prices members were asked to plow under from one to twenty acres of cotton each and plant other crops instead. This plow-under movement, a forerunner of the AAA by some 28 years, was not well received, and failed to produce the desired results.



The union's activities in cooperation with labor organizations already have been mentioned in Chapter II. They might have been carried on with very beneficial results to both parties to the coalition, but in the latter part of 1906 the Farmers' Union began to decline. A split occurred between supporters of State political leaders; rival newspapers were established, and through them the leaders fought their factional opponents. In August 1907, with statehood imminent, the two factions met in a convention at Shawnee. The differing groups were dissolved and the members merged into a new union, the Farmers' Educational and Cooperative Union of the State of Oklahoma. The structure of the organization and its aims were much the same as they had been previously, but old quarrels had not been expunged by the merger and the new union entered existence with a reduced membership.

The union took an active part in the primary election of 1907, and 43 farmers were elected to the lower house of the legislature. At the first legislature, bills were introduced for a graduated land tax and to restrict usury, both of which failed to pass. The unionists were successful, however, in obtaining passage of the Blair Bill providing for the creation of the State Board of Agriculture.

In the decade after 1907, membership in the Farmers' Union shrank from 40,000 to a few hundred. Although internal dissension had provided the groundwork for the decline, the chief cause was the adverse interpretation of the State laws governing corporations. According to the courts the cooperatives were to be dealt with in the same fashion as other corporations. In other words, any person could hold stock in them whether he was a farmer or not. The natural result of these rulings was that the cooperatives soon had many shareholders whose interests, if not opposed to those of the farmers, were not always identical with them. And, rather

than remain in institutions which were theirs in name only, the farmers dropped out.

#### THE OKLAHOMA RENTERS' UNION

While the Farmers' Union and the Farmers' Alliance were highly democratic organizations, it is evident that they appealed chiefly to a person who had or who could borrow money; money or its equivalent, of course, being necessary for the setting up of cooperatives. They could not take in the great mass of sharecroppers and propertyless tenants, an agrarian group which probably was in much greater need of organization than any other. So, in 1909, a third association of farmers was organized — the Oklahoma Renters' Union.

The preamble of the constitution of the organization declared that:

... the financial emancipation of the working class can only be accomplished when the means of life have passed into the hands of the workers. This great good can be accomplished only through a united class-conscious organization of workers. . . .

The Renters' Union was unable to provide financial emancipation for its members, but the list of demands that it put forth comprised a significant document which revealed conditions among tenants and pointed the way to their partial alleviation. One of the demands, the shifting of crop insurance from private companies to a governmental agency, is a major plank of the Roosevelt administration's farm program.

An important provision of the union's program was that landless farmers might acquire the right of occupancy to State owned lands. It also provided for the election of a



Department of Agriculture from actual dirt farmers. The total membership of the union for any period is a matter of dispute, but within a year after the organization of the first local, others were functioning at Calvin, Henryetta, Oklahoma City, Yuba, Ada, Stillwater, Sterling, and several other places. Little, however, was ever accomplished by these bodies either individually or collectively. The union's program might well have served for a debating society, but for the men who often trudged miles on an empty stomach to attend a meeting, it was far too idealistic. As their enthusiasm for oratory waned and nothing was provided to re-stimulate them they ceased to attend, and in a few instances committed acts of violence upon the property of their landlords. In a hearing before the Commission of Industrial Relations held at Dallas, Texas, in 1915, Patrick J. Nagle who later became prominent in Oklahoma politics, strongly defended the union and minimized the damage done. By this time, however, or even a year earlier the union had almost completely disintegrated.

#### THE GREEN CORN REBELLION

Cotton farming is notoriously favorable to tenancy, and because of this and the conditions under which the land was settled, eastern and east-central Oklahoma had always had a particularly serious tenancy problem. Not all the farmers in this section, of course, were impoverished tenants, but they were sufficient in number and activity to generate widespread and dangerous unrest.

Though but faintly understood, the theory of socialism gave to these people a new hope and promise of equality. So much so, that by 1911 the party had won one-third of the votes in Seminole, Pontotoc, Pottawatomie, Hughes and Pittsburg Counties. But the idealistic program of the Socialists in time became as unsatisfactory as that of the Renters'

Union, and by 1914, many of the farmers were toying with the idea of syndicalism.

In the latter part of 1914, a militant secret organization known as the Working Class Union had sprung up in Arkansas. Its leader was Dr. Wells LeFevre of Van Buren's "Hobo Hollow," and its program — although highly idealistic — was one of action rather than of aims. It advocated the abolition of rent, interest and profit-taking; Government-ownership of public utilities; and free schools—and proposed revolution as the means to the end.

Although the union soon spread into Oklahoma, where it established a number of lodges, the improvement in the economic status of the farmers, as Europe turned to America for war supplies, caused it to wane before it was well-rooted. By the spring of 1917, most of the local groups were inactive.

Then, H. H. "Rube" Munson, allegedly an I. W. W. leader from Chicago, came into the Canadian River country. Munson effected a radical reorganization of the union, enlisting younger and more spirited men and appointing "captains" to assist him in the drive. The promulgation of the National Draft Act, just when the farmers were beginning to emerge from years of poverty, aided him in his work. Declaring that as drafted men were sent to the front, women, children, and old men would be forced to bear the brunt of farm production, he aroused deadly resentment against conscription, against the rich, and the Government.

Theoretically, the W. C. U. was an international organization, but it is generally acknowledged that most of its members were in Eastern Oklahoma. The exact membership is unknown, since each local lodge was practically autonomous and records were seldom kept. But according to Doctor LeFevre, the union had 34,800 adherents. John Spears, Roy Crane, and Munson were the main leaders in Oklahoma. Others prominent in the organization were "Captain" W. L.



Benefield, of Lone Dove community, and Homer Spence, a farmer living near Tate, the State secretary.

On June 7, two days after the date set for registration by the President's proclamation, five men were arrested at Seminole and charged with draft resistance; the first of a series of similar arrests that continued throughout the summer. The plan at first was to hide men of draft age in the wooded country near the Canadian River; but these defensive tactics were discarded for acts of violence. Arms and dynamite were obtained; the waterworks at Dewar was blown up, and nine members of the W. C. U. were arrested and charged with the offense. Water mains and sewers were dynamited at Henryetta.

Several "armies" were organized and sent into the field, subsisting on barbecued beeves "requisitioned" from the countryside and wagon-loads of roasting ears (from which the name, "Green Corn Rebellion"). County sheriffs made up posses of citizens and moved against the rebels, but the mutinous farmers withdrew. They had planned to march to Washington — a few days' distant, in the opinion of many of them — to take over the Government for the people. They had not contemplated shedding their neighbors' blood, and they refused to do so. The only fatalities were two members of the rebel army.

The revolution ended early in August. It was estimated that 2,000 farmers, including Negroes and Seminole Indians, had taken part in it; and more than 450 were arrested and held for trial. Of these, 193 were charged with draft resistance; 8 (leaders), with seditious conspiracy; and the remainder were freed or paroled. Eighty-six men were convicted by the Federal courts.

#### IV. THE WAR AND POST-WAR PERIOD

*NOTE: For purposes of clarity, the coal-miners' disputes occurring during this period are discussed in Chapter V.*

**I**N the months immediately preceding the United States' entry into the World War, industry in general rose on a wave of prosperity and with it rose wages and employment. With the Nation's declaration of war, Government mediation boards were established to prevent interruptions in commerce, and superficially at least, the labor scene was tranquil. Potentially, it was far from being so.

In 1916 the four railway brotherhoods presented a list of demands to the railroads, the most important being the eight-hour day. The operators refused to accede, and a Nation-wide strike was set for September 2nd. After the Federal Board of Mediation and Conciliation had failed to effect a peaceful settlement, President Woodrow Wilson asked Congress to enact legislation to deal with the situation. Thus on September 2, the day scheduled for the beginning of the strike, Congress passed the Adamson Act providing for the eight-hour day. The Kansas City Southern Railway instigated a legal fight against the Act, but the courts held it valid.

The Federal government took over operation of the roads for the duration of the war, and of necessity frequently called upon the brotherhoods to work much longer than an eight-hour day. But since appropriate provisions were made for overtime by the Adamson Act, under which the Government operated the roads, there were no complaints. With the cessation of hostilities the railroads were returned to their



owners. A railway labor board chosen by the President and consisting of three members each from the operators, the workers, and private citizens, was established to mediate disputes.

The first problem that confronted the new board was a demand for pay increases by the six unions forming the Federated Shop Crafts. These were the International Association of Machinists; the International Brotherhood of Blacksmiths, Drop Forgers and Helpers; the Amalgamated Sheet Metal Workers International Alliance; the Brotherhood of Boiler Makers and Iron Ship Builders and Helpers of America; the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers; and the International Brotherhood of Stationary Firement and Oilers. After a long hearing, the board, on July 20, 1920, increased the pay of the workers more than 600 million dollars, or approximately 21 per cent.

The resultant peace due to this decision was comparatively short lived. For a long time shopmen had complained of the contracting of work, to which they felt that they were entitled, to non-union shops. Probably, in the face of the pay rise awarded them on July 20, they would not have pressed the issue to an extremity, but on July 1, 1921, the Railway Labor Board ordered a reduction of approximately 12 per cent in the wages of the workers and again, in July 1922, ordered a similar pay cut. These acts, combined with the indirect hiring of non-union men by virtue of the contract system, caused the shopmen to threaten a Nation-wide strike. The railway executives, in turn, declared that the strike, since it would be a violation of the Railway Labor Board's decision, would be against the United States government. They refused to arbitrate the matter and absolved themselves of responsibility.

After all attempts to effect a peaceful settlement had failed, the six shop crafts with a membership of about

400,000, struck in July 1922. About 1,500 workers in Oklahoma answered the strike call and laid down their tools.

Psychologically, the workers could not have walked out at a poorer time. Business was only beginning to emerge from a recession, during which almost all workmen, small businessmen, and farmers were obliged to accept cuts in income. There was not only a large army of unemployed from which the railways readily could draw strikebreakers, but there was a feeling generally that the shopmen were attempting to maintain wartime wages under post-war conditions. Too, that effective weapon of strikers — boycott — was denied the shopmen. The railroads were practically the only means of transportation, and directly or indirectly almost every person was compelled to use them. In fact, in many quarters which ordinarily might have been sympathetic, the shopmen encountered antagonism and apathy. Farmers, threatened with delays in shipping their products, the building-trades workers, laid off because of a shortage of materials — these and many others were against the strike and, in varying degrees, the strikers.

Union leaders claimed that the strike was almost 100 per cent complete in all sections of the State, but this probably was an exaggeration. Train service was seriously curtailed in many places, but Ardmore was the only city in which service was completely suspended, and that for only a short period. In Oklahoma City, the Chamber of Commerce furnished men to fill the positions vacated by the strikers. Governor J. B. A. Robertson sent troops to all sections where violence was reported or threatened. In addition, forty special United States deputies were delegated by Attorney General Daugherty to protect the property of the M-K-T Railway. This heavy patrol to "preserve law and order," not only curtailed the alleged unlawful practices of the union, but practically brought to a standstill its legitimate acts. In many places



business men were notified by Federal officers that it was a violation of the law to have signs in their windows supporting the striking shopmen. In Enid a number of firms which displayed signs reading, "We are for the shopmen 100 per cent" were ordered to remove them.

On July 23, the shopmen submitted a list of modified demands to the railways. They asked discontinuance of the contract system, the establishment of a national board of adjustment, and the preservation of seniority rights for the strikers.

Company officials would concede none of these points nor would they agree to re-hire all of the men out on strike. President Warren G. Harding then made five specific proposals to a joint meeting of union leaders and railroad operators. The Harding proposals were:

1. That employees abide by the decisions of the Railway Labor Board in the future.
2. That employees who had remained on the job be given preferential treatment and seniority rights.
3. That strikers accept the wage reduction pending a rehearing of the board.
4. That "farming out" of shop work be discontinued.
5. That there be a discussion of the establishment of an adjustment board.

Strikers complained that except for number four of this list of proposals, it might be said that Harding had asked much more for the railroads than they would have asked for themselves. Needless to say the proposed settlement was not satisfactory to the shopmen and they refused to accept it.

On September 2, Attorney General Daugherty obtained from a Federal court one of the most sweeping labor injunctions ever issued. The order prohibited the strikers from

issuing statements or interviews; using their funds to carry on the strike; picketing; holding parades; and urging friends and strikebreakers to quit the services of the railroads.

In the face of this devastating instrument the strikers were helpless. Throughout August the American Federation of Labor and the State Federation had raised funds to aid the strikers. Now, under the provisions of the injunction, even this support was denied them.

Although the strike was not officially declared ended until June 1923, it was practically broken with the issuance of the injunction. The employers won a complete victory and inaugurated the open shop throughout the Southwest.

#### THE PACKING-HOUSE STRIKE

One of the first conflicts between a large-scale employer and employees was the packing-house strike of 1904. The Union of the Amalgamated Meat Cutters and Butcher Workers of North America was then only ten years old and the termination of the strike found it almost completely disorganized. Until the beginning of the World War, the union remained one in little more than name.

With the beginning of the war, however, and the concomitant shortage of supplies and labor, the organization assumed a new lease on life. It is doubtful that it offered much more to its members than would have resulted from the laws of supply and demand. But, at any rate, it grew rapidly, and with America's entry into the conflict it was negotiating with the packers for contracts. As was the case in other basic industries, the Government intervened to see that differences were settled amicably, to preclude any delays in production. And with the aid of Federal Judge Samuel Alschuler, an agreement satisfactory to both packers and workers was drawn up. This was to expire on September 15, 1921.



With the expiration of this agreement, the union was in a strong position as far as membership was concerned, but it no longer had a friendly mediator in the Government, and there was no longer a shortage of labor, either skilled or unskilled.

After several conferences the packing companies announced a 10 per cent wage reduction to go into effect November 29, 1921, in all packing centers in the country. In October the union took a strike vote, declaring that it had not been recognized in conferences, and authorized a walkout. On Monday morning, December 5th, more than a thousand workers walked out of the Oklahoma City packing plants. The business section was crowded with strikers and sympathizers and there were many fights and other disturbances. Three strikebreakers were beaten by unionists, and plant operators talked of obtaining an injunction.

Minor disturbances continued daily until December 22, when a riot occurred at the entrance gates to the plants. The *Oklahoma News* declared that: "Exchange Avenue is strewn with glass from Western Avenue to the gates entering the stockyards, that was broken out of car windows by rocks thrown by the rioters." The day after the riot Governor J. B. A. Robertson sent letters to the mayor, the sheriff, and the Oklahoma county attorney, threatening to send in State militia unless the rioting was under control within twenty-four hours. Claude Connelly, State Labor Commissioner, stated that since the strike call had come from the union's headquarters in Chicago, he could do nothing.

A peculiar feature of the situation was that the strikers had partisans among the administrators of the law. Mayor J. C. Walton, who had been elected on a labor platform, was openly on the side of the strikers, speaking at their meetings and contributing large amounts of groceries for their soup kitchen. At this time, also, Oklahoma City had the only

policemen's union in the United States affiliated with the American Federation of Labor, and the officers were constantly charged with favoring the strikers.

The strikers, then, were supported, tacitly at least, by the police and the mayor. The packers, for their part, were aggressively aided by the Chamber of Commerce and the sheriff's office. Despite the financial backing of the packers, the unusual strength mustered by the strikers might have permitted them to win out in the struggle. That they did not is largely due to lack of discipline on the part of a few of their number resulting in the hanging on January 14, of Jake Brooks, a Negro strikebreaker.

Public sympathy swung away from the strikers. The Chamber of Commerce grew more vociferous in its demands for martial law. Governor Robertson offered a reward of \$2,000 for the arrest and conviction of participants in the lynching. And within a few days twelve men had been charged with complicity in the murder.

The lynching, and speedy capture of the mob members, practically broke the strike in Oklahoma. (It was not officially ended until February 1, 1922.) The strikers began trying to secure their former jobs and the union lost the majority of its members. Eventually the charter was sent back to national headquarters, and the strikers were without a union until 1933, when the present Local 89 was organized.

#### FARMER-LABOR RECONSTRUCTION LEAGUE

It is evident from the foregoing pages that the years immediately following the World War were marked by a national wave of conservative reaction. The great "open shop" drive by Chambers of Commerce throughout the country was shaking the foundations of collective bargaining. The new word "Bolshevik" had replaced the outworn "Socialist" as a



stigma for left wing votaries; and the "red hunts" of Attorney General A. Mitchell Palmer, during the closing months of the Wilson administration, seemingly met with popular approval. In short, it was not a propitious time for economic reform movements.

Running contrary to the national trend, Oklahoma, during this early post-war period, witnessed the rise of a progressive reform movement of considerable consequence. This movement culminated in the Farmer-Labor Reconstruction League of Oklahoma.

The Reconstruction League was started as an offshoot of the Non-Partisan League of North Dakota, which was formed by some of the leaders of the Socialist Party in 1914, and embraced the immediate objectives of the Socialists. Within two or three years after its inception the Non-Partisan League had succeeded so well that its leaders visioned a strong national organization. It is probable that the North Dakota group selected Oklahoma as a propitious State in which to expand because of the strong Socialist influence manifested in previous elections.

L. N. Shelden, one of the North Dakota organizers, came to Oklahoma in 1917 to begin organization here. Before any progress could be made the United States entered the war and activities were suspended. But in 1920, Shelden relaunched his campaign, drew up a complete economic program (which was almost identical with the current demands of the Socialist Party), and solicited farmer support. John Simpson at this time was vigorously engaged in reorganizing the Farmers' Union, and Shelden succeeded in interesting Simpson in his program. He stumped the State with Simpson, and espoused the League's doctrines at the same meetings where Simpson appealed for Farmers' Union support; consequently, as the farmer organization grew, so grew support for the league.

The original intent of its founders was to build the league strictly upon farmer support, as had been done in the present State. But the two main bodies of organized labor in Oklahoma, the State Federation of Labor and the railroad brotherhoods, proved so favorably disposed toward the idea that they were invited to participate in building the new order. By the autumn of 1921 so much enthusiasm had been developed among farm and labor groups that the time was considered auspicious for the actual launching of the organization.

Shawnee was chosen the convention city, and delegations representing the Farmers' Union and the two organized labor groups met there in September 1921, and officially organized the Farmer-Labor Reconstruction League of Oklahoma. (The term "Reconstruction" was used instead of "Non-Partisan" partly to reflect more nearly the nature of the organization — its leaders had decided to work within the Democratic Party — and partly to dispel the idea that it was actively connected with the North Dakota group.) A seven-member State executive board was selected that included Frank Davis and John L. Britton of the Federation of Labor; Earl Witt of the Order of Railway Conductors; and J. B. Tosh, J. A. York, W. A. Villines, and C. C. Rhodes of the Farmers' Union. The *Reconstructionist* was designated the official organ of the league, with Shelden as editor. George Wilson was chosen State manager.

A constitution and a declaration of principles, embodying a rather sweeping economic reform program and amply testifying to the progressive nature of the new order, were adopted at the first Shawnee convention. The announced purposes of the organization were:

1. To extend the scope of the cooperative laws, both national and State, so that warehouses and similar insti-



- tutions might be established.
2. To reorganize the Department of Agriculture (State) in such a way as to aid in the marketing of farm products.
  3. To establish a State bank so that funds raised by the public might be used for the public good.
  4. The establishment of a home ownership commission, whose duty it would be to acquire ownership of land to be sold to actual farmers on a long-time payment plan at low rates of interest; the State to sell bonds for the financing of the enterprise, such bonds being secured by a mortgage against the homes.
  5. Free textbooks and free printing for the schools of the State, with at least a seven-months' school year compulsory.
  6. The eight-hour day for labor, the strengthening of the compensation laws of the State, the prohibition of child labor, a minimum wage law for women, and limits upon the issuance of injunctions in a labor dispute.

At the first annual convention of the league which began February 23, 1922, at Shawnee, a slate of candidates for entry into the Democratic primary the ensuing summer was nominated. Although the convention was called by the Reconstruction League, delegates from all organized farm and labor groups — whether they were members of the league or not — were seated. The 752 delegates were chosen in the following manner: 104 from the Farm-Labor Union; 221 from the Farmers' Union; 236 representing trades unions; 140 Reconstruction League members; and 51 representing Maintenance of Way employees.

It was apparent from the opening of the session that J. C. Walton, mayor of Oklahoma City, was the choice of a majority of the delegates for the gubernatorial nomination. When

John Simpson, president of the Farmers' Union, declined to run, Walton received the unanimous approval of the convention. In addition to Walton, the delegates selected a complete list of candidates for State and national offices.

The league set up a State headquarters and began a vigorous campaign. The *Reconstructionist*, in colorful language, condemned the practices of "big business" and the State press, and extolled the merits of the farmer-labor group's program. It presented many cartoons demonstrating the harmony between the farmer and the organized laborer. In turn the league was subjected to considerable animadversion from the State press. The *Tulsa World* reflected the general sentiment of State newspapers with the statement that:

"What it (the Reconstruction League) contemplates is to invade the primary of the Democratic Party. . . . The platform is not only radical, it is revolutionary. It is a class platform designed to set up State socialism."

The campaign was hotly contested from the first day until the last. The farmer-labor coalition, buttressed by a \$3.50 membership fee from an estimated 40,000 members and with a sizeable contribution from the railroad brotherhoods, carried its doctrines to the "grass roots," both by sending out speakers and by distributing literature.

J. C. Walton was the real leader in the league's campaign. Not only was he acceptable to the organized farmer and labor groups — but he was a colorful figure and a good speaker who appealed to the masses of farmers and laborers. In addition to the program adopted at the first Shawnee convention, he spoke on "Sixteen Farmers' Facts" — a pamphlet written by Patrick J. Nagle, which set forth the agricultural ills of the State and Nation and proposed remedies.

When the primary vote was counted, after a long vituper-



ative campaign, it was seen that the former mayor of Oklahoma City had a plurality of approximately 35,000 votes over his nearest opponent, R. H. Wilson. The vote was, Walton 119,000 and Wilson 84,320. In other State races the league won eleven of twenty nominations. The farmer-labor coalition was least successful in the congressional races, being victorious only in the Fifth District.

At the conclusion of the primaries, the league continued its campaign until the November elections. It did not amalgamate with the Democrats, but maintained separate headquarters, and only worked in behalf of its own candidates.

In general, the same groups that opposed Walton's nomination — the State press and the Chamber of Commerce — extended their operation into the general election by supporting the Republican nominee, John Fields. At one time during the campaign, George Wilson, state manager of the Reconstruction League, sued *Harlow's Weekly* for \$75,000 for alleged slander. The case was later dismissed, however, and Wilson resigned from his office.

When the final vote was counted, Walton had a margin of approximately 50,000 votes over his Republican opponent. The other league-endorsed candidates also were victorious over their Republican opposition.

In his first message to the legislature, the Governor recommended that that body enact into law a major portion of the league's program. Included in his recommendations were: That the credit of the State be lent to farmers' cooperatives, for the purpose of building warehouses and elevators; that those buildings be constructed of cement, and the cement used be manufactured by a mill bought or built by the State; said cement also to be used to build State roads — and if convicts were used in operating the mill, they should be paid at the current rate of pay; that the Democratic (Reconstruction League) platform on tenant farming be enacted

into law; that a resolution be passed submitting a constitutional amendment, which would change the compensation law so as to make compensation possible in case of death of an employee in industry; and that free textbooks be provided by the State.

None of the major provisions advocated by the league, except the one calling for free textbooks, was enacted into law during the abbreviated Walton administration. During his eleven months in office, Walton was so busily engaged in his "war" on the Ku Klux Klan that he had little time to devote to pushing the farm and labor program in the legislature. He won the enmity of a number of the legislators by his stand against the Klan, thereby lessening his chance of securing favorable action by the lawmakers on the farm-labor measures. He also lost considerable support from the Reconstruction League members by his failure to stand by the appointment of George Wilson, former State manager for the league, to the presidency of the Agricultural and Mechanical College at Stillwater. Walton appointed Wilson to the position, then removed him because of strenuous opposition. The opposition was led by John Whitehurst, President of the State Board of Agriculture, who had sought the endorsement of the Reconstruction League, and who, when defeated for the endorsement, ran as a regular Democrat and was elected. A number of Walton's staunchest supporters in the league felt that the Governor had betrayed them by removing Wilson.

Attacked from almost every quarter, the Governor was suspended from office on November 19, 1923. Among the charges on which he was impeached were: diversion of funds; levying of martial law when a state of rebellion did not exist; unwarranted issuance of pardons and paroles; and general incompetency.

In 1924 an attempt was made to revive the organization



under another name — the Farmer-Labor League. The renovated order started an independent political party and entered a list of candidates in the general election of 1924. In spite of the fact that the new third party had a candidate for the United States Senate, it appears that most of its members voted for Walton, who ran for that office on the Democratic ticket. Evidence to that effect is presented in the fact that the Farmer-Labor candidate for the Senate, George Wilson, polled only 15,000 votes, while the rest of the ticket received more than 40,000 votes. The next general election, that of 1926, witnessed the complete downfall of the farmer-labor coalition, with the group polling less than 2,000 votes.

It is difficult to estimate the influence exerted by the Farmer-Labor Reconstruction League toward securing reform legislation in this State. It cannot be disputed, however, that it called the attention of the people to the need for action on farm and labor questions; and it remains a significant fact that the people of the State elected a Governor pledged to a definite progressive reform program at a time when the Nation as a whole was committed to a policy of conservatism.

## V. PROSPERITY

### THE MINERS AND THE

#### CORONADO CASE

**F**OLLOWING a strike in the coal mines near Prairie Creek, Arkansas, in the summer of 1914, the Coronado Coal Company sued the United Mine Workers of America, charging violations of the Sherman Anti-Trust Act, and was awarded three-fold damages amounting to \$750,000. For thirteen years the union, aided by almost every other labor organization, fought the decision. The case was carried from court to court and was reviewed three times by the Supreme Court of the United States, which handed down advisory opinions. It was settled in 1927 for a fraction of the original damages, but the long period of litigation proved one of the most harmful ever endured by labor.

The situation was this: According to the courts' rulings, unincorporated associations, such as trade unions, were much like partnerships and the responsibility of each member for acts committed in his behalf was unlimited. Every member of the UMWA, then, could be held for his share of the judgment; and there was no certainty that other acts of the union's officers would not bring other and even greater claims. It was inevitable that a partnership potentially so expensive would not be entirely appealing to the unorganized worker, and that it would weaken the morale of those already organized.

Alarmed at the manifest dangers in the Coronado decision, the American Federation of Labor, in 1916, used its influence to have the Clayton Act amended to exempt labor unions



from the provisions of the anti-trust laws. The amendment read:

The labor of a human being is not a commodity or an article of commerce, and nothing contained in the anti-trust laws shall be construed to forbid the existence and operation of labor, agricultural or horticultural organizations. . . . Nor shall such organizations or the members thereof be held or construed to be illegal combinations or conspiracies in restraint of trade under the anti-trust laws.

This qualification of the act was, of course, of tremendous importance to labor in general. But it was not retroactive and the miners still were faced with the damage claim. Union leaders declared that their organizational drives and bargaining ability were at no time hampered, but it is not easy to agree with this statement.

During the first year of the World War, through mediation by government arbitration boards, the union received three pay rises, elevating the scale to \$7.50 a day. At the close of the war, the price of coal was still high and the demand heavy; taking these facts into account the UMWA demanded the continuation of the war-time wage. The mine operators refused to accede and the union called a strike. In Oklahoma about 7,000 miners walked out in response to the call. This was on October 31, 1919.

Though there was but little indication of violence, Governor J. B. A. Robertson immediately complied with the request of the mine operators to send the National Guard into the coal fields, declaring that "all the machinery of the State will be used in keeping the mines in operation" and that he would "show the union men who is running the State." The Governor dispatched some 2,000 troops to the Coalgate, McAlester-Wilburton, and Henryetta areas. Martial law was

declared in Pittsburg, Latimer, Haskell, and Okmulgee Counties, and four troops of United States Cavalry were stationed in the strike zone to support the State militia.

Despite the Governor's energetic measures, he did not fulfill his published declarations. Non-union miners were in the minority by far and could not begin to keep the mines at their normal production. As winter came on and coal reserves were exhausted, many portions of the State were practically without fuel. Suffering became intense, particularly in the western area where there was little wood or natural gas.

Robertson threatened deportation for all alien miners who refused to give up the union and return to work under the open-shop plan. But the miners did not return, and the threat was not carried out. The power to deport aliens is vested in the National Department of Labor whose secretary refused to issue the deportation orders. The Governor then ordered all convicts at the State penitentiary, who had mining experience, into the mines; but this move also failed to achieve the desired results. Prisoners with mining experience were few, and displayed little interest in their task. The National Guard was next commanded to operate the mines. The guardsmen, however, having had no experience in mining, proved even more disappointing than the convicts. A little coal was produced, but at a cost that almost placed it in a class with the precious minerals.

In slack times, the coal operators probably would have been content to prolong the strike indefinitely, but they could not ignore, in this instance, the rich profits offered by the steadily rising price of coal. In December 1919 the miners went back to work at a temporary scale of \$5.50 a day, and in June 1920 they received a two-year contract at \$7.50.

The contract was extended in 1922 to cover a similar period; and in the same year the Supreme Court of the United States reviewed the evidence in the Coronado case. It



absolved the International UMWA of liability, but held that District 21 was guilty of violating the Sherman law, sustaining the opinion of the lower courts. The decision was largely based on the precedent established in the Danbury Hatters case of 1908, in which the court held that union members could imply sanction of unlawful actions of their officers by continued membership in the union after such acts were publicized. Expressed approval, either antecedent or subsequent, was not necessary to establish individual liability.

District 21, of course, was in no position to pay the plaintiff \$750,000, and the legal battle continued. It obtained a rehearing in 1926, and, received an adverse ruling; in 1927 another. Meanwhile, the affairs of the union had grown steadily worse.

In March 1924 the Southwestern Coal Operators' Association and the three southwestern districts of the UMWA signed a four-year wage agreement calling for \$7.50 a day. Within three or four months, however, the operators, feeling the effects of a depressed coal market, began abrogating the agreement and instigated an intensive open-shop campaign.

For several months during the summer, the mines were shut down, and in the fall the operators attempted to reopen them at the \$5.00 scale. Several disturbances occurred, with the result that Governor M. E. Trapp called a conference of unionists, open-shop workers, and mine operators. No settlement was reached, and on September 1st, 7,500 Oklahoma miners refused to work, claiming the operators had broken their contract with the United Mine Workers of America.

Almost immediately, the operators called on Governor Trapp for troops to quell alleged acts of violence. The Governor sent Major-General Baird H. Markham of the Oklahoma National Guard into the coal fields to investigate an explosion at Hartshorne and other acts attributed to the union. After a thorough investigation, Markham reported

that the explosion was not perpetrated by union men, and that the amount of damages caused by it had been highly exaggerated. Acting in accordance with this report, Trapp refused to declare martial law in the strike area or to dispatch any troops to the scene.

In 1925, as a result of a large union demonstration, the Governor ordered a company of militia to Okmulgee. The troops arrested four men who were released by the Criminal Court of Appeals when their contention that they were praying and not picketing was sustained. Judge R. L. Williams, of the United States District Court, then issued one of the most sweeping and severe injunctions ever granted against a labor union in the history of Oklahoma. Judge Williams later rescinded the injunction, and charged the operators with misrepresentation. The rescinding order, however, was not issued for several months, and could not correct the damage already done the union cause.

At the time of the abrogation of the contract, the operators had introduced about 600 Mexican strikebreakers into the McAlester area and a similar number throughout the other coal fields. About 1,000 farmers also were recruited from the surrounding rural communities for work in the mines. The Mexicans, for the most part, soon joined the union; but the farmers, poor and often illiterate, refused to give up the best-paying jobs they had ever held for the sake of a principle.

The lockout dragged on, with failure for the union cause becoming more certain every day. Railroads and factories had begun, since the war, to substitute oil and natural gas for coal on a large scale; and the opening of new oil fields in the Southwest had accelerated the movement. Furthermore, natural gas had practically replaced coal for domestic uses — not only in the cities, but in many towns and villages. The mine operators claimed they could not, without going bank-



rupt, have paid the \$7.50 wage. Many of them claimed they could not operate profitably at the \$5.00 scale.

Largely through the support of local unions and other districts of the UMWA, District 21 carried on the fight for three years. It did not formally capitulate then, but for all practical purposes its resistance was ended. With extremely rare exceptions, the open shop was firmly established and the \$5.00 scale and often less was being paid. Already a union in little more than name, District 21 received the death thrust with an adverse settlement of the Coronado case.

The collapse of the miners was a severe blow to the Oklahoma labor movement. Since the late 'nineties, the miners had formed the vanguard of every struggle for better wages and improved working conditions. For more than twenty years they had furnished a large part of the money and a major portion of the leadership for nearly all union organizational drives. Much of the labor legislation of Oklahoma was the handiwork of the organized miners. The passing of their once-powerful union formed a dark page in the trade-union history of the State.

#### THE BUILDING TRADES

With the absorption of post-war surpluses, business began to improve in 1921 and by 1922 recovery definitely was under way. Commerce was stimulated by unprecedented advertising campaigns and installment buying. And American capitalists were subsidizing foreign countries to the tune of some eight billion dollars with which to buy American goods.

Still relatively undeveloped, Oklahoma rode the crest of the wave of prosperity. One big oil pool after another was discovered. New and larger refineries were built. Scattered pipelines began to stretch into a network that eventually was to reach a value of \$400,000,000. It had been possible, previ-

ously, to handle the greater part of the outside capital at work in the State from its eastern sources. But with the rapid development of oil and other industries local headquarters became necessary, and the existing office buildings were entirely inadequate for the need. So, also, were the housing facilities for the horde of new employees. By 1927 building permits in Oklahoma City alone exceeded one million dollars a month, and they were maintained at that figure for more than two years.

Although the building boom was reflected in all lines of endeavor, the trades directly connected with it received its full effect. This is not to say, however, that they enjoyed any very great measure of prosperity. The largest construction jobs in the state were handled by open shop contractors; and the finances of the State Federation of Labor became so depleted that for several years they were unable to pay salaries of the president and secretary. With the reorganization of the miners in 1931, and the consequent strengthening of the A. F. of L., many contractors that had been operating open shop, again began hiring union craftsmen. The organization of the oil field workers in 1933-35 also greatly augmented the membership of the State Federation of Labor.

As a general rule, periods of rising prices are followed by considerable union activity and labor unrest. However, organizational activity in this State during the era of "prosperity" was noticeably light. This was partly due to the great influx of migratory workers; partly to the strength of employer associations such as the Chamber of Commerce and the National Association of Manufacturers.



## VI. DEPRESSION AND RECOVERY

### THE UNEMPLOYED ORGANIZATIONS

**D**UE to a number of major oil discoveries and the coincident building boom, Oklahoma remained a bright spot on the industrial map long after other States were firmly in the grip of the economic depression. In the words of Roger Babson, Oklahoma City was the "gold spot" of the Southwest; and clearing house figures supported this seemingly euphemistic term.

Attracted by the promise of employment and high wages, the economically disinherited from every State poured into Oklahoma. At the same time, agrarian workers within the State — tenant farmers and farmers who had lost their land — were drawn into the cities, not to find work but to swell the ranks of the vast hungry, homeless, and restless army of the unemployed. Since labor is the smallest item involved in drilling, a supply of unemployed was no inducement for increased development in the oil industry. And the building trades, the one other major field of endeavor, were practically closed to all but local craftsmen. For the trader in salvage, the expert geologist, the shrewd lease-trader or drilling contractor, Oklahoma had much to offer. But for the average man — the clerk, the farmer, the mechanic and day laborer — it had nothing at all.

Chain-store clerks worked sixteen hours a day for as little as \$9.00 a week. Waitresses worked for their meals and shared their tips with their employers. In Oklahoma City, the advertisement of a shipping clerk's job at \$17.00 a week attracted



a mob of more than five hundred men. And even for such positions as brush salesmen there were long waiting lists. In some instances crowds of the hungry raided grocery stores; they broke into unoccupied dwellings and stripped them of plumbing. They established themselves in vacant apartments and houses, burning doors and woodwork for fuel, fighting eviction with clubs and fists.

In 1930, 45,358 persons in Oklahoma were unemployed. By 1933 the figure had risen to 301,310, or approximately 42 per cent of all the workers in the State. With so large a number of persons out of work, about the only organizational activity to meet with success was among the unemployed. Organization here was not directed primarily toward securing jobs and improving working conditions, but toward obtaining adequate food, clothing and shelter from relief authorities. These organizations, first termed Unemployed Councils at the time of their appearance in 1932, were nothing more than grievance committees whose authority was largely assumed. But as the severity of the depression increased, with alleviation in the form of jobs seemingly far off, workers who previously had remained aloof from the Unemployed Councils became members. The nominal grievance committees, with little or no permanent organization, developed into the Unemployed Councils, with 80 locals and a membership of approximately 30,000. In Oklahoma City alone there were 23 locals with an aggregate membership of 7,000.

Relief authorities lacked the means to meet the demands for even a bare subsistence; and government responsibility for relief of the unemployed had not yet been fully recognized. The situation came to a head in May 1933. Several thousand unemployed, called together by the Unemployment Councils, met in Civic Center in Oklahoma City. A committee elected by this mass meeting consulted with the FERA offi-

cials, then recommended that the people go home and return the following day. A group of provocateurs and hot-heads denounced the leaders and stirred the crowd to make a demonstration march to the Federal Commissary. Police and firemen were waiting at the Commissary. The demonstrators were greeted with tear gas and firehoses; some who resisted were arrested on the spot. Other leaders were picked up during the next two days and held for Federal Court.

In February 1934, after a dramatic trial, eleven members of the Councils were convicted of seditious conspiracy, ten being sentenced to the Federal Penitentiary for a year and a day, and the eleventh, a Negro, George Hopkins, for eighteen months. An attempt was made to appeal the convictions, but was dropped for lack of finances.

In January preceding this trial, members and sympathizers of the Councils conducted a vigorous campaign to raise funds for the defense and to indicate broad public protest against the arrests. Thousands of postcards, letters and telegrams poured into the offices of Judge Vaught and Federal Prosecutor Lewis, demanding the release of the prisoners. Many people contributed to the defense fund. In an attempt to check this movement, more were arrested, charged with "Conspiracy to obstruct justice." Among these were Marshall Lakey, well known Oklahoma sculptor, who had offered to do a bust for the person raising the greatest sum for the defense fund, and Harry Bender, who had just been exposed by the Communist Party as an agent provocateur sent into Oklahoma City to attempt to smash the growing Oil Workers' Union.

Bender pleaded guilty, asking for a suspended sentence, and was sentenced to serve eighteen months in the Federal Penitentiary. Lakey and the others entered pleas of nolo contendere and were released for lack of any evidence of conspiracy.



The arrest and conviction of their leadership spelled the end for the Unemployment Councils, but many of the members aligned themselves with other groups. Chief of these was the Veterans of Industry of America, a mass organization established in 1932 by Ira M. Finley, a former president of the Oklahoma Federation of Labor. The aims of the VIA were much the same as those of the councils; the distinguishing feature between the two was that the councils were national while the VIA was State-wide in character.

In 1935, the VIA initiated an old-age pension plan which was defeated in the State Supreme Court, largely through the efforts of the Chamber of Commerce. The organization also sought, without success, the enactment of a graduated land tax. Despite the defeat of these two measures, the effectiveness of the VIA is not to be minimized. It performed a very real service in assisting NRA code-enforcement officers; and it has consistently sought better working conditions on public construction projects.

The first Workers Alliance local in Oklahoma was formed by fifteen Oklahoma City WPA workers in April 1936. Its aims were those of the national organization — more jobs, better pay, and better working conditions; it also acted to mediate grievances between the workers and the PWA and WPA authorities.

The alliance supports the election of progressives to public offices, and advocates larger expenditures for work relief. According to officials of the organization, the Workers Alliance had, in 1939, twenty-five locals with an aggregate membership of approximately two thousand.

#### THE NRA AND THE OIL-FIELD WORKERS

The NRA of 1933 received the same hearty welcome — and farewell — in Oklahoma as it did elsewhere. And it was of

lasting importance only in that it accustomed to organization workers in many crafts which had never been, or only partially, organized.

Although an oil-field workers' union was organized at Kiefer in July 1907, no permanent union came into existence until the NRA period. Its first local (No. 209) was established at Seminole on July 20, 1933, one month before President Roosevelt approved the petroleum code.

The code, as finally approved, provided for a 40-hour week for producing and marketing workers; a 40-hour week for clerical employees in drilling, production and pipeline departments; and a 36-hour week for employees in all other branches of the industry. Filling-station workers received a minimum weekly wage of \$12-\$15; others, a minimum of 48 cents an hour. Since the code was observed almost as much in the breach as otherwise, it is difficult to estimate its value. However, it did result in increased employment and the abolishment of the 12-hour day.

In May 1934 the first of a series of oil-workers' strikes began with the walkout of Sinclair-Prairie employees. They returned to work on May 14th after the company agreed to recognize the right of collective bargaining, and to reinstate certain employees who had been discharged. The company also agreed to enter into negotiations concerning a closed shop and restoration of the 1929 wage scale.

Petroleum code violations by the Phillips Petroleum Company resulted in a strike of filling-station employees in July 1934. The code labor-policy board declared the company had deliberately interfered with the employee organization efforts, and ordered it to desist. The strike ended in a victory for the workers on August 26th when they were granted wage increases averaging 14 per cent and a collective-bargaining agreement.

On June 22, 1934, there was a walkout of 425 employees



of the Champlin Refining Company, at Enid. The workers demanded the reinstatement of four discharged union men, recognition of the union, and compliance with the petroleum code. After some minor disturbances, an agreement satisfactory to the strikers was reached on July 11, 1934.

Although the Petroleum code was still in effect, there was a general personnel reduction by Oklahoma's major oil companies during the latter part of 1934 due to the curtailment of proration allowables in the Greater Seminole area. Then, with the collapse of the NRA, there was a further increase in unemployment; and throughout 1935 there was a great deal of unrest in the oil fields. During the year the National Labor Relations Board, established on July 3, mediated disputes between the following companies and their employees: The Sinclair-Prairie; the Indian Territory Illuminating Oil; and the Superior Oil. The Sinclair and ITIO disagreements, involving, respectively, seniority and wages, were amicably settled. The employees of the Superior Oil Company struck on October 16th, charging the company refused to bargain collectively; and on October 17th they were restrained by injunction from interfering with drilling operations. The strike was never settled.

In August 1936 the oil workers were suspended from the A. F. of L. and became a C. I. O. affiliate. An intensive organization drive followed, with most employers fighting the spread of unionization.

Workers of the Empire Oil Company (a subsidiary of Cities Service) struck January 1, 1937, charging repeated refusal of their demand for collective bargaining. Although 80 per cent of the Empire workers were unionized, they were without a contract. The strikers inaugurated a boycott of Cities Service filling stations and cut off production on more than 150 wells in the Seminole field. The strike was settled on February 14, 1937, with the company granting substan-

tially every demand of the union.

Another strike of importance was that of W. B. Pine employees in October 1937. The Pine company claimed that it did not engage in interstate commerce, and was not subject to the provisions of the Wagner Act. NLRB investigators from Washington entered the field; but the Pine interests did not negotiate a contract with the union until February 5, 1938, after which the strikers returned to their jobs.

The Jones Oil Company strike of the same month involved 150 union men who conducted a short sitdown in protest over the discharge of ten of their members. Feeling was so intense that Governor E. W. Marland placed the Healdton oil field under martial law and then appointed a citizens' committee to mediate the dispute. The move was successful and an agreement was reached on October 22 by which the union obtained a substantial wage increase and other concessions.

Considerable violence attended the Pure Oil Refinery strike called on May 26, 1938, at Muskogee. The strike affected approximately one hundred workers who charged that there had been discrimination against union members after a plant shut-down of ninety days. The NLRB was called into the controversy and secured a settlement on July 26 that provided for the reinstatement of forty-three union workers, with pay of back wages for a certain number.

Many issues, arising over a period of years and never settled satisfactorily, resulted in a strike at the Mid-Continent Refinery — Oklahoma's largest. Among the more important factors in the dispute were questions involving wages, seniority rights, the check-off, and liberalization of the company's vacation policy. Negotiations began in the latter part of October and ended — with a strike — on December 22, 1938.

The National Guard was sent into the strike zone on December 24th, and the 800-acre refinery grounds, as well as a



considerable surrounding area, were placed under military law. Machine guns were placed atop some of the low brick buildings three blocks removed from the boundaries of the plant, making picketing virtually impossible. The union then began a picketing campaign against retail outlets of company products.

As the strongest branch of the CIO in Oklahoma, the Oil Workers could not lose the strike without irreparably damaging the movement of which they were a part. At the same time, defeat for the Mid-Continent meant strengthening the CIO which had long been anathema to the entire employer group. These were the real issues in the struggle; the matters of seniority, wages, and vacations were not in themselves important. Both sides to the controversy refused to make concessions, and conferences instigated by the NLRB and Governors Marland and Phillips were ineffective. The indictment of 140 strikers on conspiracy charges on April 22 was bitterly assailed by the unionists, but did not result in any weakening of morale. And in May 1939 a satisfactory settlement of the strike seemed as far off as it had ever been.

#### THE LEAD AND ZINC MINERS

Since 1910 northeastern Oklahoma has been one of the most important lead and zinc mining areas in the United States. But, until the coming of the NRA, the several thousand men employed in the industry were, virtually, unorganized. In 1912, 1916, and 1924 the International Union of Mine, Mill, and Smelter Workers established locals throughout the district, but they were short lived and ineffectual. The mine operators made organization unattractive by raising wages as soon as union representatives entered the field; and by propaganda and espionage. Generally, the union existed only through sufferance and as long as it was quiescent.

This situation was changed with the advent of the NRA. The miners rapidly organized; and on May 8, 1935, when it was the strongest in its history, the union called a strike to obtain recognition. The strike involved approximately 25,000 men in the entire Tri-State district and was directed principally at the Eagle Picher Lead Company and the Eagle Picher Smelter Company, largest operators in the area.

The mine and smelter operators retaliated by raising wages and instigating a back-to-work movement. As a result, many of the workers dropped out of the union. This group, under the leadership of F. W. (Mike) Evans, formed themselves into the Tri-State Metal Miners and Smelters Workers Union, which soon became known as the Blue Card Union.

Acts of violence occurred daily as the Blue Card unionists attempted to operate the mines. Local peace officers were unable to prevent rioting and National Guardsmen were sent into the Oklahoma sector. Operations were carried on sporadically as the strikers sought to prevent the Blue Carders from entering the mines and mills. In one instance, they stretched a large American flag across the highway near Commerce, Oklahoma, to keep non-strikers from reaching the large Commerce mills. During this period the operators voluntarily increased wages an average of \$1.50 a day, although there was no appreciable increase in either the price or demand for ore.

Fights and disturbances between the two factions increased in bitterness until on April 11, 1937, they culminated in a day of sanguinary rioting. *The Blue Card* reported:

The "tremendous mass meeting" advertised by the Committee for Industrial Organization Sunday at 2 o'clock in the afternoon simply didn't materialize for several reasons, the chief of which was several thousand pick handles in the hands of as many brawny



miners who came into Picher to see that no outside organization got a foothold in the district for the express purpose of calling a strike in the face of the best working conditions in the history of the district.

The meeting was not held in Picher and a similar meeting announced to be held at Galena later in the afternoon was not held although a bunch of cowardly assassins rained a salvo of pistol bullets and shotgun slugs into a small army of Blue Carders who went there from Picher to stop the meeting as they paraded through the town. Nine persons fell victims to the dastardly assault.

One man was killed by gunfire and nine others suffered bullet wounds. Dozens were severely beaten. As the *Record* succinctly stated:

... squads of shock troops (Blue Card Unionists) from the various mines milled about in the crowds ... and it wasn't long before the CIO sympathizers' heads were bouncing off the cudgels. ... Every ambulance in the city was held in readiness. Both Picher and American hospitals were kept busy patching up the injured.

On December 6, 1937, officials of the CIO filed charges of unfair labor practices against the Eagle Picher companies and after a six-months hearing the NLRB ruled the Blue Card to be a company union and ordered Eagle Picher to cease and desist from encouraging membership in it. Another ruling of the NLRB issued at Joplin on December 13, 1938, ordered the reinstatement with back pay of 130 striking employees. The companies served notice of appeal and no decision has yet (May 1939) been handed down.

### THE TEXTILE WORKERS

Another CIO affiliate, the United Textile Workers of America, deserves some mention, even though local No. 1840 at Sand Springs is the only one in the State. It was organized on August 16, 1933, as a direct result of NIRA's Section 7-A, which guaranteed the workers the right of collective bargaining. The original membership was estimated to have included about one-third of the employees of the Commander Mills, Oklahoma's one important textile plant.

On September 4, 1934, the union called a strike involving 500 men in the Sand Springs mills. The strike leaders complained of the non-recognition of seniority and favoritism by foremen, and declared that young girl employees were subjected to indignities (see proceedings before the Textile Labor Relations Board of NRA: United Textile Workers Local 1940, complainant, vs. Commander Mills, defendant, Federal Courtroom, Tulsa, October 24, 1934). The Union also charged the employers with complicity in the formation of a company union. At the end of three weeks the strike was lost and the union leaders were discharged. However, the labor code authorities of the NRA ordered their reinstatement with back pay.

Early in 1935 G. A. Bartlett, president of the local, was fired allegedly for union activities, and the UTW again called a strike. When pickets were thrown about the plant, a clash with a group of non-union men and mill bosses ensued. The foray was of short duration; the attackers were forced to flee and company officials ordered a shut-down of plant operations. For a number of weeks fist fights and riots were frequent in the streets of Sand Springs. Each side charged the other with responsibility for the outbreaks. A number of bombings were reported, and at one time a cache of 220 sticks of dynamite was discovered on the outskirts of the city.



In the autumn of 1935 the mill operators secured a temporary restraining injunction against the union and reopened the plaintiff with strikebreakers. The union filed a complaint with the NLRB charging unfair labor practices. No decision has been handed down in the case (May 1939); and though the strike never has been officially called off, the mills have continued to operate on an open-shop basis.

#### THE AGRARIAN ORGANIZATIONS

As has been mentioned in Chapter III, the Farmers' Union was practically broken up by an early court decision which held that the union's cooperatives were subject to the same laws as other corporations. However, in 1917, a new law was passed in Oklahoma protecting cooperative enterprises from outside speculation. And in 1919 with the end of the World War, John A. Simpson, president of the State Farmers' Union, began a vigorous drive to revive the attenuated organization. So rapidly did the membership increase that within a year after the war it was five times as great as in 1918.

The union supported the Farmer Labor Reconstruction League (see Chapter IV) and, on a national scale, opposed the lowering of surplus profit and inheritance taxes and advocated larger issues of paper and silver money. In order to promote this political program, the union established lobbies at various State capitols and at Washington, D. C.

With the coming of the economic depression and the subsequent New Deal recovery measures, the political program of the organization was expanded to include the remonetization of silver, revaluation of the gold dollar, and a cost-of-production guarantee for farm products. In Oklahoma, the union entered the field of cooperative medicine — an undertaking which has been bitterly fought by the American

Medical Association. A cooperative hospital at Elk City has been established and is supported almost entirely by subscriptions from the farmers' organizations.

John Simpson, who was successful in reviving the Oklahoma union, was elected national president in 1931. Tom W. Cheek was selected for the office vacated by Simpson, and has continued to serve in that position. In 1931 the Farmers' Union had 20,000 members in this State and owned more than a hundred cooperative cotton gins and about the same number of grain elevators and stores. Under Mr. Cheek's administration the membership increased steadily to 32,000 in 1938, while the cooperative business in the same year had a turnover of approximately fifty million dollars.

The Southern Tenant Farmers' Union came into being almost as a direct result of the Agricultural Administration Act. The AAA, by materially reducing the acreage of the South's one great commercial crop, displaced thousands of tenants. Furthermore the tenants' share of the parity payments from the plow-under program was not paid to them but to the landlords, and the tenants complained, often with reason, that they did not receive all they were entitled to. The union, then, organized in Poinsett County, Ark., July 13, 1934, had as its chief purpose the presenting of a united protest against inequalities in the operation of the Government farm program. The original local, composed of both whites and Negroes, had only twenty-five members. The organization grew rapidly in eastern Arkansas, and soon spread to Tennessee, Mississippi, Texas, Missouri, Georgia, and Oklahoma, meeting and overcoming the opposition of the landlords and often experiencing violation of civil liberties.

The first local in Oklahoma was established at Muskogee in September 1935, with about a dozen charter members. With Muskogee as organizational headquarters, the union spread rapidly into several eastern and southeastern counties. The



first annual State convention was held in the city in January 1936, with delegates from some fifty locals, representing a membership of about one thousand. A noticeable feature of the convention was the harmony between the white and black races — about 60 per cent of those in attendance were Negroes.

In the program formulated at the convention, the union demanded: That rental and parity payments from Government programs be paid direct to the tenants by the Federal Government; that the eviction from the lands be stopped and that no discrimination be allowed on account of membership in an organization of the workers' own choosing; free schools and busses to transport children to and from school and free text books; the right of all farm workers to organize without fear of violence; better wages, hours, and conditions for farm labor; a written contract with the landlord specifying minimum standards regarding housing, furnishings, etc.

After passage of the National Labor Relations Act, the STFU, realizing that the provisions of the act could not apply to agricultural workers, demanded that various States pass similar laws guaranteeing the right of collective bargaining to farm employees.

The Southern Tenant Farmers' Union more nearly resembles the urban trade union than did any of the antecedent agrarian organizations. Only farmers on the lower rungs of the ladder are included in its membership — share tenants, sharecroppers, and wage hands, with a preponderance of members recruited from the two last named categories. The membership also includes certain industrial workers in agricultural processing enterprises.

In the spring of 1935 the union presented something unique in the way of demands for better wages and shorter hours — \$1.00 a day for ten hours work. When a strike was actually called to obtain these humble objectives, the Nation

for the first time became aware of the pitiful conditions existent in the cotton belt. The "dollar for ten hours" campaign was carried on in the cotton growing section in eastern Oklahoma, and while a strike was never staged in the State, the demands were met in many places.

Perhaps the most important accomplishment of the STFU is that of making the Nation conscious of the low living standards associated with cotton production. In 1936 the Governors of Arkansas and Oklahoma appointed commissioners to study the tenancy situation in their respective States and to make recommendations to the legislatures. Responding to the commissioners' recommendations, Oklahoma passed the first landlord-tenant relations bill in the Nation in 1937. It provided for: Preparation of equitable rental contracts; an educational campaign to convince both parties of the advantages of long time contracts; meetings of landlords and tenants to promote better understanding; and the working out of a basis for arbitration of differences.

The act was more in the nature of a resolution than a bill to correct a serious situation; but it had the merit, at least, of recognizing the existence of a problem. In the same year that the landlord-tenant relations bill was passed, President Roosevelt appointed a committee to make a study of farm tenancy in the United States. One of the President's appointees, W. L. Blackstone, was a representative of the Southern Tenant Farmers' Union.

#### THE COAL MINES

One peculiar feature of the depression was the organization drive of the United Mine Workers of America. The success of this move may be explained by the fact that the coal miners had had too strong a tradition of unionization to operate very long under the open-shop plan; and also by the



fact that the operators were much less powerful than they had formerly been.

After four years of the open shop in the Oklahoma coal fields, the International organization of the UMWA sent David Fowler, an organizer, into the State early in 1931. Beginning in the Henryetta field, Fowler met with such success in his first few months work that by November 1931, 1,500 miners had been enrolled in the union in that area. Most of the new recruits were former UMWA members who had returned to work under the open shop plan following the union's disintegration four years earlier.

The union was given a test of its strength soon after its revitalization when, in November 1931, it presented a list of grievances to the coal operators, and demanded their correction. Most important of the grievances was a wage reduction from \$5.00 to \$3.60 a day; another was the "task system," which placed the loading of coal on a day-wage basis. Other grievances charged were: Failure of the operators to cooperate with the workers, as prescribed by law, in maintaining a check-weighman; and failure of the operators to meet and discuss grievances with the miners' committee.

When the operators refused to meet and bargain with the workers as a group — they insisted on dealing with each man separately — the revived UMWA union called a strike of 1,500 members in the Henryetta field. Contrary to the procedure followed in other strikes, no effort was made to import strikebreakers; consequently, the organized miners were able effectively to tie up mining operations. The operators, for the most part, temporarily closed their mines pending settlement of the dispute.

The State Board of Arbitration and Conciliation was called upon to mediate the controversy, a sharp departure from the struggle-to-the-finish tactics previously employed in coal strikes. The Board began its investigation on De-

cember 31, 1931 — the strike was called off when the arbitration was agreed to — and made the following observations:

We find that the coal industry is fast disappearing from the industrial life of the State. The coal miners did not average 80 days per man in the Henryetta field during either of the years 1930 and 1931. Their earnings did not average \$2.50 per miner for each of these years at the \$5.00 a day wages. On the other hand the coal operators are hard hit and some have quit business. None of them admit having made money in recent years and nearly all of them claim to have lost money.

The Board recommended:

1. Abolition of the task system of loading coal, and its replacement by the tonnage rate system.
2. All men who suspended work on November 2 should be re-employed.
3. The operators should cooperate with the workers by collecting the check-weighman's wages from the employees authorizing him to do so.
4. There should not be any discrimination against any employee for having membership in the miners' union, and the miners should be allowed a committee to adjust their grievances.
5. The wage reduction should remain in effect during the remainder of that season.

The miners accepted the Board's findings, but the operators only accepted it in part. The arbitration resulted in a settlement of the strike and a better feeling between the two sides. The following year they resumed contractual relations.

With the Henryetta field solidly organized the union drive

was pushed into eastern Oklahoma. By November 1932 twenty locals had been organized in the McAlester-Harts-horne field, and others had been set up at Wilburton and Shady Point.

The output and value of coal reached a new low in 1933 and the amount of employment and the wages paid were correspondingly low. With the advent of the recovery measures of the Roosevelt administration — especially the coal codes of the NRA and the Guffey-Snyder Coal Act — the coal mining industry showed some recovery. The output of coal increased from 986,902 tons worth \$2,960,000 in 1933 to 1,102,115 tons worth \$3,030,000 in 1934, and to 1,353,495 tons worth \$4,057,000 in 1938.

In the worst depression years, 1932-33, the miners in the Oklahoma coal fields averaged only 93 working days. Their hours were almost unlimited and wages sometimes less than \$2.50 a day. The number of days worked rose to 105 in 1934 and has continued to increase slightly, reaching 120 days in 1938. The work-day was shortened to seven hours in 1934, and in 1939 wages had risen to \$5.00 a day.

On May 19, 1938, District 21 signed a union-shop agreement. The union-shop differs from the closed shop in that the operator may hire whom he pleases with the understanding that those hired must become a party to the union agreement by joining the United Mine Workers of America.

#### THE PACKING-HOUSE STRIKE

The expressed issues involved in the Wilson & Company packing-house strike of 1935, were union recognition and seniority rights; but the underlying causes were deeper.

Following a brief walkout in 1934, Wilson and Company employees returned to work upon certain promises by the company, which they thought indicated that the Interna-

tional Union of Butcher and Packing-house Workers would be recognized, and that seniority would be taken into account in such matters as job assignments, promotions and vacations. The company took a different position. It insisted that each grievance be taken up by the person aggrieved and would consider no mass or group complaints. This system led to charges of discrimination, and whether intended to be or not, was a source of humiliation to organized workers in the plant. The unionists charged that through giving members cause to feel aggrieved, the company was trying to force them to strike, so that the union, already weakened by the invalidation of the NRA, could be wrecked.

The company protested that its labor policy was the same as it always had been and that there was no real basis for complaint. As the controversy became heated, large groups of men were bedded down inside the plant at night and released as the morning shift came on. They did not work, although they drew wages and the union considered them potential strikebreakers. Needless to say, their presence did little to ease an increasingly tense situation. Another disturbing fact, from the viewpoint of the strikers, was that, while maintaining an unfriendly attitude in Oklahoma City, the company was on amicable terms with the union in other places.

At a mass meeting attended by some 1,500 persons on May 21, 1935, Gomer Smith, attorney for the Oklahoma City union, dwelt at some length on this peculiar lack of national policies in a national company. "The meat-packing companies are one giant trust," Mr. Smith declared. "They have decided that the time is ripe to cast aside cooperation with the New Deal and break the unions by forcing strikes and walkouts on the workers. . . . It's very clever strategy having just one plant in each city affected."

Believing that they would be playing into the company's



hands by striking, the union tried to settle the dispute amicably, even after an overwhelming majority of its members had voted to strike. Representatives offered to submit the difficulty to the NLRB, or to abide by the decision of a committee selected by Frances Perkins, Secretary of Labor. They agreed to accept the findings of any five or ten local judges, including Federal District Judge Edgar S. Vaught. Finally, they proposed to accept any settlement which a committee from the Oklahoma City Chamber of Commerce might care to make. The suggested members of the committee were three newspaper editors, a bank president and the president of a department store.

In the face of increasing unrest the company persisted in the attitude that the workers had no grievances and that there was, therefore, nothing to arbitrate. It declared that the majority of the employees were well satisfied with their jobs, and that such difficulty as existed was a teapot tempest, resulting from the activities of "two Communist agitators." Apropos of this statement, the *Oklahoma News* commented editorially:

... They (the company) could have rested the case with the committee composed of John A. Brown, E. K. Gaylord, Carl C. McGee, John Campbell, and the editor of this paper, but would not. Do they — Wilson & Company — believe this committee would sustain a group of ruthless labor leaders or outside agitators? Would this group be expected to sustain any unwarranted union grievances or demands? The public awaits a more plausible reply than has been given by local or Chicago offices (of the company)....

On June 4, 1935, some 400 members of the union struck. Sheriff Stanley Rogers and 10 deputies were at the gates of

the packing-plant when the workers walked out, and the strikers had been cautioned to avoid violence; but trouble arose almost immediately. In an editorial on June 6, the *Oklahoma City Times* said:

... Before the day closed there had been two fist fights. Dynamite was reported found in the packing plant. A much greater area was picketed. These are not tactics likely to operate peacefully. There actually was violence in the strike before the first day ended. . . Government is breaking down when the police powers fail to provide the protection for which it is maintained.

With the passing of the first day, there was hardly even the threat of violence. Wilson & Company operated on a somewhat curtailed schedule with strike-breakers, and the union concentrated on keeping out those workers who already were out rather than interfering with non-unionists. It also enlisted the aid of other labor groups in raising funds, and laid the groundwork for a boycott of the company's products.

On June 6 the *Oklahoma News* printed an open letter to James D. Cooney, executive vice-president of the company, asking him to reconsider his refusal of arbitration.

... Why not (it asked) devise a peace plan that will impose no humiliation upon anyone including the leaders? Invite these strikers to appoint a committee of three to meet with your representatives . . . and have all differences thrashed out and peace restored, or adopt some other plan. Please do for all concerned.

Mr. Cooney replied with a paid advertisement in the *Daily Oklahoman* (morning edition of the *Oklahoma City Times*), on June 8th.

... regret that we are unable to suggest any plan whereby the strikers can return to work collectively. However, if you are willing to talk this over with your friends, families, and dependents and then do some individual thinking, I am willing to offer some suggestions . . .

His proposals were that the workers apply for their jobs, individually, submitting any grievances they might have to the local manager of the company. He questioned the motives of the union leaders, suggested that the union was on the verge of collapse, and stated that "... only the captain has a duty to a wrecked and sinking ship."

... If you believe this strike is wrong and unnecessary (he concluded) . . . present yourself at the employment office and request your old job back. . . . There will be no discrimination because you belong to a union or because you went on a strike. If any man is not re-employed it will be for other valid reasons which you will understand better than we do. What can you lose by trying?

Few workers answered this appeal, although the company claimed that a steady stream of them was "sneaking over back fences" into the plant. The strike entered its third week with 454 unionists out, and several hundred strike-breakers holding their jobs. The latter were allowed to leave the plant for the weekend and return to work on the following Monday with little interference from pickets.

During the first few days of the walkout, the union began picketing the chief retail outlets for Wilson & Company products. As time passed, however, this activity was largely replaced by an "educational" campaign. Mass meetings, to

which the public was invited, were held, not only in Oklahoma City but in almost every town of size in the State. Speakers explained the stand of the union, and asked that no Wilson & Company products be purchased. Labor unions outside the State also were drawn into the boycott.

The company retaliated with a direct-mail campaign addressed to housewives. In addition, it brought pressure upon concerns which were dependent upon its goodwill to have their employees purchase Wilson meats.

In the eleventh week of the strike a satisfactory settlement seemed as far off as it had at the start. Some 365 unionists still were out, hardly a store in Oklahoma City was carrying the Wilson line, and as far away as Memphis and Denver consumers had been drawn into the boycott. But Wilson & Company continued to kill and, apparently, dispose of as much livestock as it ever had. There was every indication that it could do so, indefinitely.

The company's activities were sustained, in no small amount, by contracts with foreign governments; and a considerable quantity of meat doubtless went into storage. Still, it is difficult to understand how it could maintain its normal output despite the almost total loss of its local — and largest — market. The boycott was not extended, of course, to products not appearing under the Wilson brand.

As is the case with large industrial plants in many cities, the packing companies were technically outside the city limits. While paying no city taxes, they had police and fire protection, were connected with the city water and sewerage systems, and enjoyed most of the other advantages of municipal government free of charge. They were permitted these benefits because of their stimulating effect on the livestock industry and business in general. But in the early days of the controversy with the union it was pointed out that the packers were under obligations to the city — that it was their



duty to remain on good terms with their employees, if at all possible.

As Wilson & Company persisted in refusing all offers of arbitration, the union proposed the annexation of the packing-plant area to Oklahoma City. The support of other labor unions was enlisted and petitions were circulated in an effort to obtain the 7,000 names necessary to force a special election. Whether the move was a wise one is debatable, since it would have affected union plants as well as Wilson's, but it obviously was not to the interests of the latter concern to have it succeed. In July, the company indicated that it was willing to entertain negotiations to settle the strike, and a meeting between W. W. Martin, the plant manager, and Governor E. W. Marland was set for the 12th of the month. The annexation plan was held in abeyance, in the interim, and, although nothing came of the conference, it was never revived.

The strike dragged on, month after month. The company, apparently, was suffering not at all; the plight of the unionists daily became worse. They had done everything that could be done by peaceful means; their boycott, on the surface at least, had been surprisingly successful. And yet the plant was operating at its normal capacity, as undisturbed as if there had been no strike in progress. Bitterness arose against the union; the union's attorneys were accused of promoting the struggle for their own ends. Once more it was being conclusively demonstrated that labor, without protective legislation, was no match for entrenched capital.

On February 4, 1936, the strikers accepted the fourth offer made by officials of the company. In it the company agreed to "recognize" the union, to give jobs to twenty of the strikers immediately, and to absorb the others "as soon as possible."

John Malone, vice-president of the Butcher Workers, pronounced the settlement a "union victory."

#### THE TAXI DRIVERS STRIKE

In 1937 there were approximately 1,000 taxicab drivers in Oklahoma City. They comprised one of the largest unorganized groups in the municipality and also one of the lowest paid. And yet, in few trades, were the hours longer, the work more nerve-racking, and the chance for advancement as meager.

The great cab fleets, the result of the city's rapid expansion, enjoyed a tremendous patronage. On a busy day in the downtown district twenty-five cabs might be seen in a single block. But despite the fact that the drivers worked twelve-hour shifts and carried dozens of passengers in the course of a day's work, their condition steadily became worse. Low fares were only responsible in part for the situation.

Every cab concern in the city except the Yellow Cab Company leased their taxis to the drivers at rates which averaged \$3.00 for a twelve-hour shift. This fee was payable before the driver went on duty, and if he exceeded a certain number of miles during his shift he paid an additional sum when he went off. He also was required to buy gasoline and other essentials from the company. Not infrequently a driver lost money on a twelve-hour shift.

In September 1937 the A & A Cab Company with one hundred taxis and two hundred drivers installed governors on their cabs, limiting the speed of the vehicles to about thirty-five miles per hour. The drivers protested that even when they were free to drive as fast as they liked it was difficult to make a living, and that with governors they could not do so at all. The company declared that the governors were necessary since they did not carry liability insurance. The drivers

then asked for a reduction in lease fees sufficient to compensate for the reduction in their earnings. This was refused.

At four o'clock on the morning of October 26 the night shift walked off the job. In a body they proceeded to the garage of the O C Cab Company, where they were joined by a majority of the drivers there. Rapidly, the drivers of the Y & Y Cab Company were drawn into the strike, and those of the Skirvin, the A B C (Negro subsidiary of the A & A) and the Yellow. Within twenty-four hours there was hardly a cab to be seen on the streets of the city. Organizing as a unit of the International Union of Teamsters, Chauffeurs, Stablemen and Helpers, the drivers issued a formal strike order on October 28.

Thirty Y & Y cabs were sent back onto the street, and J. H. York, manager of the O. C. Cab Company, accompanied by a strikebreaking driver, took a cab into the downtown district. The strikers acted swiftly and effectively. They piled into the Y & Y cabs as fast as they appeared and rode them back to the garage; after a few trips the company gave up any attempt to operate. When York tried to keep them out of the cab in which he was riding with a gun, they had him arrested. Soon afterwards he appeared at the labor temple to confer with the union's grievance committee. As a result an agreement was reached providing for the resumption of service by the O. C. Company, at a lease fee of \$2.60 for twelve hours; other and minor concessions also were granted the strikers.

The Yellow Cab Company was the only concern in the city with metered taxis; from it the unionists demanded an increase of ten per cent of the gross receipts. The company refused to meet the demand and sent a number of its cabs onto the streets. They, too, were ridden back to the garage by the unionists until the management ceased trying to operate them. At the same time, the strikers threw picket

lines around the Yellow Cab filling stations.

With the probable exception of the Yellow Cab Company, most of the taxi concerns in the city were in no position to have their revenues interrupted for any considerable length of time. New cabs had to be purchased in most cases every two years, and the purchases were underwritten by finance companies. Payments on the taxis had to be met at regular intervals or foreclosure was likely. Another inducement for the speedy settlement of the strike was the fact that there were strong laborites in the city council. This group threatened to introduce an emergency ordinance to invalidate the licenses of unoperated cabs.

On November 4th, the Yellow, Skirvin, and Y & Y companies agreed to union terms and put their cabs back into service. The Y & Y Company reduced its lease fee to \$2.60 for twelve hours; the drivers were to receive a bonus of \$4.50 per month for good behavior and a clear accident record. The Yellow Cab drivers were granted an increase of five per cent of the gross, and the Skirvin drivers returned to work on the basis of forty per cent of the gross without bearing any operating cost, where before they had shared with the company both gross income and expense of operation.

The A & A Company, the first to be struck, was the last to resume operations. On November 12th, John Evans, president of the company, signed a union contract similar to those adopted by the other cab concerns, and at the same time declared his willingness to sell his cabs to the drivers within fifteen days. The sale terms were to be \$2.00 per day, plus a four-cent sales tax and the operating fee of \$2.15 per day. This fee allowed the driver to operate twenty-four hours with the company furnishing telephone service and paying damage and liability claims. Evans also signed a union agreement for the Negro-operated A B C taxis.

The strike ended in a complete victory for the union. To-



day, the union has a membership of approximately 500, and all taxi companies in the city operate on a closed-shop basis.

## VII. THE CONTEMPORARY

### LABOR SCENE

**T**HE most important happening in the labor movement in recent years was the split in the A. F. of L. and the formation of the Committee for Industrial Organization, now the Congress of Industrial Organization. The dispute leading up to the split was one of long standing, and cannot be discussed here. The crux of the matter, however, was a division of opinion within the A. F. of L. as to the best method of organization. One group wished to organize all workers of an industry into a single union; the other faction preferred the established method of organizing workers according to their crafts.

In 1935, proponents of the industrial plan raised funds for the purpose of establishing new locals in the unorganized industries. Those behind the move were mostly officials of the industrial unions — such as the UMWA — then affiliated with the A. F. of L. They failed to receive the approval of the Federation, and were formally suspended during the national convention. In September 1936, the Oklahoma Federation of Labor suspended all CIO unions within the State. And during the early months of 1937 a State council was formed from them, with David Fowler, president of the UMWA District 21, as chairman. Fowler began an intensive organizing campaign designed to strengthen existing locals and to promote the establishment of new ones.

The CIO became incorporated in Oklahoma June 1, 1937. On that date a charter was given to the Oklahoma-Arkansas

Industrial Council; it was signed by John L. Lewis, president of the CIO, Charles Howard, secretary, and John Brophy, national organizer. David Fowler became president of the Oklahoma-Arkansas council, then composed of 7,500 miners, 2,000 glass workers, 3,000 metal miners and smelter workers, and 200 journeymen tailors.

The Oil Workers Union, with a membership of approximately 8,000 field and refinery workers, declined to participate in the Oklahoma-Arkansas Council. Mr. Fowler then proposed separate State organizations, which would elect their own officers, and the Oil Workers accepted. On December 18-19, 1938, the Arkansas Industrial Council was established at Fort Smith; the Oklahoma Industrial Council was organized at McAlester on January 17. Roy Ledbetter became chairman of the Arkansas Council; W. W. Allen of the Oil Workers Union was elected chairman of the Oklahoma group. Mr. Fowler serves as advisor to the two councils.

As to the present strength of the A. F. of L. and CIO locals within the State, no estimate can be made. Two of the largest CIO bodies — the Agricultural and Cannery Workers and the Oil Field Workers — have a highly transient membership which fluctuates in numbers. Then, many of the A. F. of L. locals are affiliated directly with their nationals and not with the Oklahoma Federation. Then again, of course, few union secretaries will release accurate membership figures.

It should be mentioned also that unions which are strong from the standpoint of membership are often weak financially — the STFU, for instance. On the other hand, regular work and good wages for the members of a union do not necessarily mean a strong union; in some cases it has meant quite the opposite. To maintain high wages and regular work it has often been necessary severely to restrict membership, usually by prohibitive initiation fees.

Although the coal miners have been more subject to seasonal lay-offs and fluctuations in wages than any other group, their condition, both as to finances and members, is excellent. This is because of the check-off which compels employers to collect dues from the workers' wages and pay them to union representatives. Regardless of what a miner earns, his dues are always paid. Almost every union has tried, at one time or another, to secure a check-off clause in its working agreements, but only the UMWA has been successful.

The miners, incidentally, seem to have been the first group to realize the futility of one section of "have-nots" making demands upon another. With the coal industry severely ill, with the operators in serious financial difficulties, they have pitched their lot with their employers and avoided any but the most reasonable requests. The operators, at the same time, deserve credit for clearly explaining their condition, and for making concessions wherever it was possible to make them.

Oklahoma's labor struggles in the past seem to have arisen from three basic sources: attempts to secure or maintain high wages in a declining industry; attempts of the employers to lower wages in slack times out of proportion to the rises given during prosperity periods; and demands for union recognition. This last factor has been involved in a startling number of strikes.



## PRESIDENTS

*of the*

### OKLAHOMA STATE FEDERATION OF LABOR

Pete Hanraty — 1903 to 1907.  
F. A. Bowerman — 1907 to 1909.  
C. C. Ziegler — 1909 to 1913.  
Edgar Fenton — 1913 to 1923.  
O. E. Heath — Jan. 29 to Sept. 19, 1923.  
Ira M. Finley — 1923 to 1925.  
Joe C. Campbell — 1925 to 1933.  
G. E. Warren — 1933 to 1937.  
Joe Shaughnessy — 1937 to Oct. 1938.  
Joe C. Campbell — Oct. 1938 to

## SECRETARY-TREASURERS

*of the*

### OKLAHOMA STATE FEDERATION OF LABOR

J. Harvey Lynch — 1903 to 1907.  
J. Luther Langston — 1907 to 1911.  
Ollie S. Wilson — 1911 to 1919.  
George B. Johnson — 1919 to 1929.  
Victor S. Purdy — 1920 to 1933.  
W. O. Wallace — 1933 to July 17, 1935.  
Thelma Levering — July 17, 1935 to Sept. 13, 1935.  
O. L. Crain — Sept. 13, 1935 to Dec. 15, 1935.  
L. T. Johnson — Dec. 15, 1935 to

## CHRONOLOGY

*(Only the more important items listed here  
are dealt with in the History proper)*

1882. August 6: First union in Indian Territory, Knights of Labor, organized among coal miners at Midway, in the Krebs field.
1883. April 12: Cheyenne *Transporter* reports panhandle cowboys striking for increase in wages from \$30 to \$50 a month.
1890. May 2: Oklahoma Territory organized; George W. Steele of Indiana appointed first territorial governor.
1891. March 3: Congress creates office of mine inspector for Indian Territory.
- April 15: Farmers Alliance in county convention at Claremore passes resolution that "... all monopolies are dangerous and ... will eventually enslave a free people."
1892. January 7: Eighty-seven miners killed and forty-seven seriously injured at Krebs in most disastrous explosion in Oklahoma history.
1894. April 1: Coal miners' strike; 5,000 men eventually involved.
- May 21: Governor Jones of Choctaw Nation requests U. S. troops for removing 200 striking coal miners.
- June 1: Three companies of U. S. Infantry and two of Cavalry reach strike zone; begin eviction of miners. Strikers and families loaded into boxcars and deported to Arkansas.

June 24: Coal strike lost as miners return to work at wage reductions of 25 per cent.

1898. January 16: Brotherhood of Railroad Trainmen organizes with twenty charter members at South McAlester. The lodge (Indianola No. 473) now functions at Shawnee.

October 7: District 21, UMWA, formed at Fort Smith; shortly begins taking over K. of L. lodges in Indian Territory.

1899. March 1: Miners in Choctaw Nation stage walkout that lasts until August 10. Indian government officials seek to deport strike leaders and agents of United States Department of Interior investigate controversy. More than 650 typewritten pages of testimony taken from miners and mine operators.

April 4: Building trades unions organize at Oklahoma City and plan a federation.

August 27: Choctaw division No. 394 Order of Railway Conductors organized at South McAlester.

1900. January 25: Bricklayers Local No. 1 of Oklahoma Territory organized at Oklahoma City.

May 21: Oklahoma City Trades and Labor Council chartered; organization formed by nine craft unions: typographical, plasterers, bricklayers, painters, waiters and cooks, lathers, stonecutters, carpenters and retail clerks.

July 2: South McAlester *Capital* reports "coal companies are running full capacity and there is plenty of employment for all and not at McKinley wages either."

1901. March 27: First Oklahoma local of International Association of Machinists organized at Shawnee.

September 5: Non-union employees of Atoka Coal and Mining Company vote to demand discharge of all union workers because "... union men menace the welfare of

the company and non-union employees."

1902. March 19: Railway Conductors organize Weleetka Division No. 415 at Sapulpa; the lodge removed to West Tulsa July 11, 1938.

August 28: Farmers' Educational and Cooperative Union of America organized and chartered to do business in all States of the Union.

November 8: New York newspapers accuse Farmers' Union of operating as a trust after members hold cotton for fifteen cents.

1903. January 5: Standard wage for Typographical Union members raised from \$13.50 per week of 58 hours to \$14.00 per week of 54 hours.

January 16: Shawnee garment workers receive charter from National Union.

February 6: Retail clerks organize at South McAlester.

March 6: Guthrie Typographical Union No. 287 organized.

July 12: Order of Railway Conductors organize Division No. 316 at Shawnee.

July 17: Oklahoma City laundry workers organize.

October 2: Eugene V. Debs tells Oklahoma City audience to "think for yourself."

December 28: Twin-Territory (now Oklahoma) Federation of Labor organized at Lawton; Pete Hanraty president.

1904. February 15: Samuel Gompers signs charter for Twin-Territory Federation.

August 1: M-K-T telegraph operators strike; passengers warned that trains cannot operate safely with inexperienced telegraphers.

September 1: Savannah coal mines, closed since explosion which killed 18 men on April 4, 1866, reopened.



1905. Farmers' Union inaugurates first crop curtailment program in the United States, but movement fails as many members refuse to plow under from one to twenty acres of cotton.

March 21: Farmers' Union merges with Farmers' Educational and Cooperative Union of America; Oklahoma membership estimated at 30,000.

March 28: Eugene V. Debs addresses labor congress at Muskogee.

May 26: Farmers' Union resolves that "... when men, women, and children go hungry ... it's not over-production but under-consumption."

June 6: Tulsa Local No. 403, International Typographical Union chartered.

July 23: Railway Conductors organize Oklahoma Division No. 476 at Oklahoma City.

December 5: Farmers' Union protests that certain business concerns are conspiring to prevent direct-to-consumer selling by union business agents.

1906. March 15: *Indianapolis Union Signal* reports "... the manufacturing world is now ready to do business with the Farmers' Union because they recognize the farmer is organized to protect himself."

July 25: Order of Railway Conductors establishes local at Chickasha; receives designation of Washita Valley Division No. 257, August 7.

August 20: Farmers' Union, Federation of Labor and Four Brotherhoods, convening at Shawnee, appoint joint board of ten members to prepare labor program for submission to Constitutional Convention.

November 29: Pete Hanraty, union representative at Constitutional Convention, declares members who accept railroad, express, and telegraph passes or franks guilty of treason to State.

1907. State Commissioner of Labor reports 303 labor organizations with 21,200 members active in Oklahoma; also reports a total of 23 strikes and walkouts during year with all but one settled satisfactorily to labor. The initiative and referendum sponsored by the Farmers' Union adopted by Constitutional Convention by a vote of 80 to 5.

July: First oil field workers' union in Oklahoma organized as A. F. of L. affiliate at Kiefer with 160 charter members; an A. F. of L. affiliate, its existence was brief as workers drifted out of field during drilling shutdown.

August 20: Railroad locomotive engineers endorsed proposed Constitution for Oklahoma as "... the best document ever written for the benefit of the working class."

September 17: Voters ratify Oklahoma Constitution.

December 2: First State legislature convenes at Guthrie; passes several measures favorable to labor.

December 5: Railroad Trainmen press bill providing maximum of fourteen working hours a day and prohibiting blacklist.

1908. February 14: Blair Bill is introduced in legislature; provides for a ten-member board of agriculture selected from actual dirt farmers.

July 25: First Oklahoma chapter of International Stereotypers and Electrotypers Union organized at Oklahoma City.

1909. Oklahoma Renters' Union organizes; proposes establishment of governmental crop insurance.

June 27: Railway Conductors organize Division No. 566 at Muskogee.

September 13: Railway Conductors organize Division No. 555 at Hugo.

1910. November: Patrick S. Nagle, Kingfisher, Socialist gu-

bernatorial candidate, receives 28,884 votes.

1911. February: Members of Glass Workers' Union are locked out in Tulsa; strikebreakers walk out in October, join unionists.

March 5: 189 street railway employees strike at Oklahoma City.

April 13: Smelter employees strike at Bartlesville, secure restoration of 1907 wage scale.

September 23: M-K-T car department employees strike for full-system agreement.

1912. March 20: Coal dust causes mine explosion at McCurtain; 80 lives lost.

1913. July 11: State mine inspector reports twelve killed and 97 injured in Oklahoma mines in past twelve months.

1914. Labor alarmed as UMWA is ordered to pay \$750,000 damages under Anti-Trust Act.

1915. The legislature passes Workmen's Compensation Law, placing administration under industrial commission.

1916. July 17: Stage hands strike in Oklahoma City. Three pickets arrested on August 3rd. Strike results in city commissioners passing law prohibiting picketing of theater; law declared invalid in Federal court.

September 7: All Oklahoma congressmen (Davenport, Hastings, Morgan, Murray, Thompson, and McClintock) vote for the Adamson Eight Hour Law, sponsored by the Railway Brotherhoods.

November 18: Two-year agreement providing for better wages and shorter hours signed between striking employees and Shawnee street railway company.

American Federation of Labor obtains amendment to Clayton Act exempting unions from provisions of Anti-Trust laws.

1917. August: Working Class Union disintegrates as leaders arrested.

1918. Federal Government takes over railroads for duration of war.

1919. October 31: 9,000 men in 125 Oklahoma coal mines strike. Governor Robertson declares "All the machinery of the State will be used in keeping coal mines in operation." Students at A. & M and Northeastern State Teachers College volunteer services as miners.

1920. March 4: Three million dollars in construction delayed by bricklayers' strike at Oklahoma City and Norman; strikers demand increase from \$9 to \$11 a day.

1921. Legislation committee of Oklahoma Federation of Labor reports "... not a single bill directed against organized labor passed the legislature."

September 21: Oklahoma Federation adopts resolution asking release of Eugene V. Debs from Federal prison at Atlanta.

October 5: Governor J. B. A. Robertson says "Union labor is striking a death blow at State institutions," as Federation passes resolution to bar convict labor in Oklahoma.

December 5: 1,000 packing plant employees in Oklahoma City join in national walkout.

1922. February 23: Farmer-Labor Reconstruction League organized at Shawnee in 1921, holds first annual convention.

July 1: Railway shopmen strike. Oklahoma railroads introduce open-shop but schedules are curtailed.

1924. September 1: Coal miners locked out; lock-out in effect until 1927.

1925. January 4: Farm and labor organizations form a permanent farmer-labor economic conference.

April 20: 3,000 miners attend mass meeting at Picher to hear organizers for the International Union of Mine, Mill and Smelter Workers.



1926. April: Wilburton coal mine explosion causes many insurance companies to cancel policies on open-shop mines.

November: Oklahoma Federation continues efforts to aid coal miners locked out since 1924. \$6,300 raised to date.

1927. March 2: Oklahoma City plasterers cease work on Perrine building to enforce demand for wage increase of \$1 a day.

May 2: Local No. 1141, Electrical Workers' Union, strikes to enforce closed shop. Workers complain that \$1 an hour scale, nominally in force under open-shop plan, is seldom met.

May 16: Organization drive at Enid results in establishment of locals among hod carriers and common laborers, electrical workers, and cooks, waiters, and waitresses.

1929. January 20: General J. S. Coxey, of Coxey's Army fame, tells members of Farmers' Union in convention at Oklahoma City that "if the farmers received the same favors at the hands of the United States as the national bankers there would be no need of farm relief."

May 3: United States Senate provides for investigation of unemployment and possible methods of relief. Findings resulting from the investigation were: Private industry should recognize its responsibility to stabilize employment; insurance plans against unemployment should be confined to the industry itself; States and municipalities should set up efficient unemployment exchanges; the United States Employment Service should be reorganized under Civil Service; the Government should provide a system of public works to relieve unemployment and establish a system of old age pensions.

1929. January 30: Bill introduced in Oklahoma Legislature, providing for pensions of \$1 a day for all persons over 70 years of age who have lived in State continuously for 12

years, dies in committee.

1930. April: Federal census reports 37,333 wage earners unemployed in Oklahoma.

1931. November: 1,500 miners return to UMWA fold after four years of open shop. Strike ensues but is settled by arbitration December 31.

November: Glasscutters strike at Henryetta and Okmulgee; back to work November 12.

1932. August: 117,000 persons unemployed in Oklahoma.

Unemployment Councils report 30,000 members; Veterans of Industry growing rapidly.

1933. 301,310 or approximately 42 per cent of all workers in State are unemployed.

June 6: Congress approves Wagner-Peyser Act providing for national employment system.

June 16: President Roosevelt signs National Industrial Recovery Act.

July 20: Oilfield workers organize first permanent local at Seminole.

August 16: Textile workers organize.

September 7: N. R. A. coal code fixes \$3.75 minimum wage for miners.

December 19: Oklahoma State Typographical Conference organized.

1934. Unemployment Council leaders sentenced on Federal charges.

January 2: Sinclair-Prairie employees receive four to thirteen per cent wage increase.

June 2: Oklahoma City packing-house employees strike; return to work after one week.

June 22: 425 union employees of Champlin Refining Company strike; return to work July 11.

July: Phillips Petroleum Company service station employees strike; return to work August 26 at wage

increase.

July 13: Southern Tenant Farmers' Union organized in Arkansas.

September: Sand Springs textile mills struck by 500 unionists; strike lost and mills operate on open-shop plan.

October 2: Empire Oil Company signs agreement with Oilfield Workers' Union.

1935: March 8: Petroleum Labor Board orders Kever Oil and Gas Company to dissolve company union.

May 8: International union of Mine, Mill and Smelter Workers call strike in Tri-State district.

May 27: Supreme Court's decision in Schechter case wrecks NRA.

June 4: Union packing plant employees of Wilson and Company at Oklahoma City strike; walkout recorded as most peaceful in city's industrial history. Strike ended February 1936.

July 3: National Labor Relations Board established.

August 30: President Roosevelt signs Guffey-Snyder Coal Act.

September 2: STFU threaten strike to force cotton-picking scale to \$1 per hundred pounds.

1936. February: Seven Oklahoma Federation Labor leaders suspended.

April: First Workers' Alliance local in State formed at Oklahoma City.

July 1: State Department of Labor reports 14 strikes and walkouts during the biennium 1934-36.

August: United Mine Workers, Oil Field Workers and the Flat Glass Workers, all with locals in Oklahoma, suspended by A. F. of L.

1937. March 29: Mailers' Union Local No. 90 organized at Tulsa as unit of International Typographical Union.

April 11: Serious riots in Tri-State lead and zinc area

as CIO and Blue Card Unionists clash.

April 15: Oklahoma's sixteenth legislature passes senate bill No. 399 (Minimum Wage Law).

June 1: Arkansas-Oklahoma Industrial Council chartered by CIO; David Fowler named president.

June 25: International Union of Laundry Workers organizes locals at Tulsa.

July: American Federation of Government Employees organize at Oklahoma City and affiliate with Trades and Labor Council.

July 20: CIO opens intensive organization campaign; concentrates efforts on oilfield workers.

October 16: W. B. Pine Oil Company employees strike; Jones Oil Company employees strike.

October 26: Oklahoma City taxi cab drivers strike as protest against "accumulation of grievances." Strike affects all cab companies in city before agreement is reached November 12.

December 5: Textile workers at Sand Springs petition State Supreme Court to reinstate their suit for \$375,320 against Commander Mills; union claims back pay for 382 members discharged during two strike periods of 1934 and 1935.

1938. January: 100 Oklahoma City truck drivers strike for union recognition and adjustment of wage and hour schedules; agreement reached January 24.

February 1: Sixty truck drivers of Nash Finch Produce Company, Oklahoma City, strike for union recognition and better working conditions; drivers return to work February 5 after receiving certain promises from company officials.

May 26: Pure Oil Company Refinery workers strike at Muskogee charging discrimination against unionists; settlement reached July 26.



July 1: Oklahoma Department of Labor's report records more labor controversies during past two years than in any biennium in State's history. There were twenty-nine strikes and walkouts involving oilfield workers, rig builders, glass workers, pipeliners, pressmen, laundry employees, iron workers, taxi and truck drivers, construction workers, and produce employees.

October 24: Joe Shaughnessey, president of State Federation, resigns to become State A. F. of L. organizer; first full-time organizer ever stationed in Oklahoma by American Federation.

November 4: Nation's major railroads cancel order for 15 per cent wage reduction, affecting 930,000 employees; decision forestalls threatened strike.

December 13: NLRB orders reinstatement of 130 mine and smelter employees in Tri-State area; also orders mine operators not to encourage membership in company unions. Operators serve notice of appeal.

December 18: Arkansas-Oklahoma Industrial Council holds Constitutional Convention at Fort Smith.

December 22: 1,000 employees of Mid-Continent Refinery at Tulsa strike for higher wages, seniority rights, the checkoff and the liberalization of the company's vacation policy; strike still unsettled May 1939.

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